

Refugee, spy or counter spy?

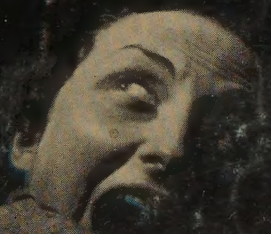
A moving story of the modern dilemma.

A close-up of a hand holding a lit matchstick. The hand is in shadow, with the matchstick's tip glowing brightly. The background is dark and textured.

# AMBUSH FOR THE HUNTER

F.L.Green

author of **ODD MAN OUT**



# AMBUSH FOR THE HUNTER

by F. L. GREEN

F. L. Green, like Graham Greene, has raised the spy-suspense-pursuit story to literary and political significance. Here, in a novel of excitement, danger and intrigue, we meet a group of fascinating characters caught in a tangle of circumstances as timely as today's front page, as deadly as an assassin's knife.

An attractive young woman arrives in London and is received with sympathy for her plight and acclaim for her eminence. Was she a refugee, a spy or counterspy? The arrival of this mysterious woman scientist in London, openly fleeing Russian oppression, raises the lid on an incredible espionage plot. In a story brimming with action and violent conspiracy, we have a penetrating study of character against the backdrop of international affairs and the master enigma of today's confrontation of East and West. This novel shows how ordinary people, loyal and patriotic citizens, unhappy with the status quo, can be sucked into subversive quicksands. An illuminating book for our times and another masterful performance of suspense from the author of the James Mason motion picture triumph *Odd Man Out*.

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AMBUSH FOR THE HUNTER

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# F. L. GREEN

## ALSO BY F. L. GREEN

*On the Night of the Fire*

*The Sound of Winter*

*Give Us the World*

*Music in the Park*

*A Song for the Angels*

*On the Edge of the Sea*

*Odd Man Out*

*A Flask for the Journey*

*A Fragment of Glass*

*Mist on the Waters*

*Clouds in the Wind*

*The Magician*

AMBUSH  
FOR  
THE  
HUNTER  
RANDOM  
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NEW YORK

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*For Heinz and Alice*

AUTHOR'S NOTE

*The scenes, characters and events portrayed in this novel are entirely imaginary*

*part one*

THE HUNTER

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*part two*

THE ALARM

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ONE

THE HUNTER



# I

When it was first sighted, the plane was an indistinct, gray speck crawling through the heat and the immensity of space which seemed to contain it jealously as though it belonged more to those regions than to the expectant world below. The little crowd assembled on the tarmac—press reporters, some Home Office and other officials, several spectators from the airport park, and some intending passengers—watched it pass from the eastern quarter into the west, where it disappeared briefly in the blue haze that extended high above all the horizons.

When the plane was visible again, it had turned towards the airport and was sinking reluctantly from the haze. The Air Hostess on duty came from the passengers' lounge, and standing a short distance from the open doorway watched the languid approach of the machine. It seemed heavy with the weight of summer's heat which persisted everywhere under the hard sunlight of noon. Coming in low above the distant green fringe of trees at the western boundary, it became a swift thing, urgent above the main runway, a machine serving human affairs, its engines pouring a muffled surge of sound across the field. Touching down imperceptibly far out there where the heat was tremulous, it resigned all but the dregs of motion. The prow flashed in the sunlight as the long white

shape turned and came waddling and throbbing towards the base and the excited chatter that flowed out of it.

A woman's voice spoke over the public-address system inside the airport buildings.

"Attention, please! Swedish Air Lines wish to announce the arrival of their flight from Stockholm."

The long, high shape, motionless and silent now, seemed to relinquish moment by moment an especial quality and to yield itself patiently to the inquisitive stare and chatter from the increasing crowd at the barriers.

In the comparative hush of summer noon on the airport, nobody seemed in a hurry, and for almost a minute nothing happened except the arrival and departure of other planes. But when the landing steps were wheeled out against the fuselage, the door of the plane opened and a steward appeared for an instant. The waiting officials strolled forward a short distance and halted.

The Air Hostess on duty spoke over her shoulder to a colleague standing in the doorway of the refreshment lounge.

"Is that Pulmer man inside?"

"At the counter with a cuppa tea."

"Tell him if he doesn't hurry he'll miss the story."

The arrival of this plane with a certain passenger among ten others was the culmination of a sensation common to the twentieth century. Millions of hapless refugees pouring and trickling across continents had familiarized a generation with the aching theme of flight from enslavement and death. Now, long after the journeys of those trudging multitudes, this plane had brought to England a solitary political refugee, a woman, one coming so late in the day that she could not be associated with those who had already passed, but who seemed rather to be the fore-runner of fresh multitudes.



She had escaped from Czechoslovakia and reached Sweden. There, the demands by Czech authorities for her immediate extradition had been answered by the clamorous, powerful voice of a world which, sympathizing with her, demanded her passage to freedom. During succeeding, tense days, her story had traveled across the world. Its few stark facts, accompanied by photographs of her, pierced the mass-conscience of anonymous millions to whom she seemed one of themselves, a victim. The machinery of universal life paused noticeably; and the voice that rose in sympathy with this refugee deluged the delicate fabric of diplomacy and insisted that charity should prevail. The refugee was given permission to proceed on her journey to England.

To proceed to, but perhaps not to reside in England. Officials—and there were five of them—had first to question her, scrutinize the few papers which she carried, interpret laws and regulations and uphold decrees. Airport employees on duty at this base had been given special instructions. So had the press reporters waiting to interview and photograph the refugee. For the public there were no instructions except those represented by wooden barriers.

The Air Hostess glanced at the passenger list clipped to a board which she carried in the crook of her left arm. A name was underlined in red ink: EVA DROUMEK. Looking up, she watched the five officials ascend the steps and enter the plane. Again, nothing happened for several minutes. She thought about Miss Droumek who, with two young male companions, had escaped from Czechoslovakia in a flimsy light plane which had been pursued by military aircraft and forced down to within two hundred feet of the ground. Then dusk, and the abandonment of the pursuit, and the continuation of the flight to Sweden.

At last, after appalling hazards, the safe landing. And at once the vindictive demands for her extradition. And in the sensational volume of sympathy that flowed to her from another direction, there was audible anger at the fact that this woman of this century was the victim of a modern state.

If she was on board the plane from Stockholm, Miss Droumek seemed in no hurry to set foot on the land of freedom and democracy. The buzz of expectant chatter rose impatiently from the crowd while the seconds passed. Miss Droumek was more than a political refugee. She was news, the heroine of a human story, the object of intense, sensational sympathy, a victim snatched at last from a vindictive government and given sanctuary. She represented the triumph of ordinary people over oppressors.

Already, the free world had seen in magazines and newsreels her agile little figure, her broad Slav face with its dark eyes and mobile lips, and its nose whose tip came to a slight fullness. Her mass of raven hair, her winsomeness and her expressive gestures, were almost as familiar to cinema patrons as the charms of their favorite film stars. She had been photographed while staying at her hotel in Stockholm. Her adventures offered editors in the free world the kind of substance which was effective as a retort to Communist propaganda. She was featured strolling amidst the conifers in the hotel gardens. She played with the little terrier belonging to the manager. She ran with him, approached the camera, looked up panting, smiled her greeting and slowly assumed a solemn, sad expression. She looked the very symbol of womanhood in distress. Her wistful smile, appearing in photographs in so many publications throughout the free world, and showing upon so many cinema screens, was impressed on the minds of a universal public fed for so long with repro-

ductions of grim, powerful faces, foxy tyrants, the familiar political scowls, the heiresses of jewels and lusts, the day-dream faces of screen stories, that she seemed real and personal to their private lives. And it was to the ordinary man and woman that her appeal was addressed.

"I plead with the free people of the world to give me passage across their frontiers and sanctuary in their territory, against the cruelty of the Communist regime from which I and my two companions have fled."

That night, her companions were assassinated and their bodies left in a narrow lane behind their hotel. If she was to be saved from a similar end, there was no time to be lost in tortuous arguments. The assassination of her companions was given precedence in radio news bulletins and in newspapers. Next day, she was given permission to travel. She left at an hour's notice. The press knew; but the secret, so far, had gone only a short distance amongst the public.

Diminutive, self-possessed, her smile immediate and joyous in the sunlight, her glances eager, her presence very graceful, she appeared at the door of the plane and stooped down to accept a bouquet of white roses passed up to her by an airport employee. She paused for an instant, and then came eagerly down with her escort of officials. There was elegance, charm, and considerable strength of personality in this dainty figure clad in light gray coat, gray skirt, a flowered blouse cut square at the neck, and a wine-colored velvet beret set on her dark hair.

The comments from spectators rose at once. Somebody laughed. Someone clapped. Tentative cheering dwindled rapidly in the heat; and again there was laughter followed by another desultory outburst of cheering which soon ended.

A voice at the Air Hostess's side said, "Through a breach in the walls, made from inside. And in she pops. All according to plan."

It was Pulmer.

"Why don't you join the party?" the Air Hostess asked.

"Join the party and see Red!"

"The one out there," she said, sharply, wishing he would take himself off.

"I've already got my version of her story," he said.

"Clever of you."

He lowered his voice, as though he were imparting a confidence.

"Have you noticed?" he said. "She never varies her statements but repeats the same thing always. As if it were a chunk of propaganda which she has memorized."

As with all his conversations, this one instantly absorbed her. But she had no time for it. She frowned as she turned to him. "Look, you had better get busy, hadn't you?"

Miss Droumek was now surrounded by the press representatives. The Air Hostess watched Pulmer saunter out, his lackadaisical figure in flannels, suede shoes, light jacket and soft hat prominent amongst the dark-suited pressmen from town. But just then the press group began to disperse and Miss Droumek approached to be checked through.

"Good morning! Miss Droumek?"

The officials had halted a few paces behind, and this passenger had come forward alone.

"Eva Droumek."

The Air Hostess made a tick against the name on the flight list.

"May I have your flight ticket, Miss Droumek?"



This passenger held several documents in her left hand. She sorted them deftly with her right hand. The Air Hostess had an opportunity to study her.

Proximity to this small, striking-looking woman rendered her in a new light. The impression of winsomeness, charm, grace, was obliterated by the force in her bold stare, as well as by the obvious, brimming strength of her personality, and the shrewd, determined character which was reflected in her expression and her movements. In her air, there was a note of egotism, and something of the aggressive assurance of a woman intent upon much more than life rendered to other people. She was elegant, and in her own exotic way she was good-looking; but she gave an impression of underlying coarseness and of something more which was false to her photographs as well as to the sympathy which she had won.

She selected one of the papers and tendered it with a smile.

"The flight ticket."

"Thank you."

The Air Hostess examined it quickly. The officials came forward, and Miss Droumek was conducted at once to the Immigration Section. The little throng of spectators dispersed, and the Air Hostess went briskly to the plane from which the remaining passengers were now permitted to disembark. Within a few minutes they had been checked through. She gathered several routine documents from the steward and led her passengers to the customs.

Later, when she was passing through the corridor leading to the tarmac where she was to meet passengers from the Belfast plane, Pulmer waylaid her. He seemed pleased with himself, and she stopped for a moment to speak to him.

"Well?"

Before she could prevent him, he edged round and examined the passenger list of the Stockholm plane.

"Mind if I . . ."

His fingers took hold of the sheet by the lower edge. She drew away adroitly at once, but not before he had found what he sought.

"Thanks," he said.

She clutched the lists tightly and frowned at him.

"What's this story you said you already had?" she said.

"Oh, that!"

But her disapproving frown seemed to check him. He seemed, to her, to be unable or unwilling to discuss the matter. There was only his fading smile and the curious intensity of his gaze that suggested something which he hesitated to express in words. Having no time in which to question him, she gave him a wry pout and passed quickly on her way, leaving him to drift inevitably to the refreshment lounge where he bought a cup of tea and some sandwiches at the counter.

## 2

He liked the airport. It had nothing of the surly clamor and murk of railway terminals: the confusion, the antheap activities, the cavern smells. It belonged to space, cleanliness, light. It was the airy destination of the human race after thousands of years on and under the roads of cities.

He was twenty-six. His job as a reporter was a lowly one on an obscure newspaper. Here, there was no political emphasis, no feeling of being part of an enormous system. In his modest employment he had the kind of freedom which allowed him time to consider his next step. He was curious about people, and had a vague idea of finding a job which would allow him to study them and eventually write plays.

He would not add his voice to the chorus of sympathy which had greeted this refugee. Instead, he kept silent and asked himself how this forceful woman with her ample funds of foreign currency, her unimpaired health of body and spirit, had attracted so much attention, while tattered, half-starved refugees, visibly distressed, arrived unnoticed.

Who had started this remarkable tremor of hysteria? What especial quality was there in this sturdy, lively woman in her luxury hotel in Stockholm to inspire such boundless pity? Who was this person who described herself as a teacher of languages, and who omitted to mention her family and friends, and contented herself with three or four statements which she never varied?

In a clumsy, inexperienced fashion, he sought the source of the story in news agencies where he was accorded the customary professional privileges. The reports were well authenticated; but his suspicions remained.

He scrutinized again his own newspaper's file of photographic prints which showed Miss Droumek at her hotel in Stockholm. Perhaps because he was skeptical and unwilling to share popular enthusiasms, he saw a woman who seemed to him to have no affinity with the image which her story and photographs had created in the public mind.

He trusted his skepticism in general, but not in particu-

lar. Thus, he hesitated to express in words his opinion of Eva Droumek. He had need of proofs to support his idea that she was bogus. He was unwilling, at first, to visit the airport when she arrived, feeling that his presence amongst the other pressmen would only add to the volume of misapplied sympathy for her. At the last minute, he decided to go.

He hardly knew what he expected to find. Nor could he define what he was looking for, or what he would do if he lit upon proof of this woman's deceitful progress. He questioned the justice of his suspicions; and admitted that, for once, this universal display of sympathy and sentimentality which had become so formidable might be warranted.

Looking around at the assembled reporters and members of the public, he wondered if any of them held the same doubts as he did. Surely, among them there were people who reasoned as he did and who exercised control over their emotions when these popular enthusiasms blew so gustily from all directions? And perhaps, in their midst, there were men and women who could give a name to the purpose behind the astounding fraud which Eva Droumek was enacting.

He searched the faces of the crowd. If any of these people shared his skepticism, they concealed it. They were outnumbered, as he was. There remained only Eva Droumek's story. And it was easy to suppose that neither press nor public was really concerned about the truth of it, since she herself had so forcibly represented herself as a political refugee, and also since there were plenty of people who had seen her land in that light aeroplane from Prague. What was paramount was the great opportunity which she had given the public and editors for making a counterblast to the deluge of Communist propaganda

which, as they knew, was a cynical, infuriating volume of distorted facts and bland lies.

But there was still Eva Droumek herself to consider. What was she? Why was she here? He wished he had not come to the airport on this splendid summer noon. In Germany, amidst the heaped rubble and the arid ruins of great cities, he had seen the disaster to which feverish enthusiasms and hysterical sentiments could hurl a civilized community. And he believed that here, on a day of majestic summer heat, a dangerous surge of emotion had brought Eva Droumek. It was thus, he believed, that calamity overtook nations.

He tried to convey all these ideas to his friend, the Air Hostess. Her response was not encouraging. But, loitering there, he had noticed something which seemed to warrant his suspicions and to give the whole affair an even more alarming hue.

One of the passengers on the plane from Stockholm was a civil servant returning from a trade mission to Sweden. This was not the first occasion on which Pulmer had seen him, for this official traveled frequently abroad by plane. And here he was now, hurrying sedulously through the corridors and asking where Miss Droumek had been taken. Somebody directed him to an inner room. He went in.

A little later, he came out to make a telephone call. He went back; and some time later, he came out chatting with Miss Droumek.

What troubled Pulmer was the fact that—when was it, and in what building?—this same man had been pointed out to him as being a crypto-Communist. At the time, he had questioned the information. It had been supported by a similar assertion from another person. He remembered now: in a newspaper office.



But he said nothing of this to the Air Hostess. Discretion silenced him. Also, it was not his function to act the detective, or to gather a scoop for his newspaper. He was here to attend Miss Droumek's arrival. That was the end of the story as far as editors wanted to take it. There was always a point when an affair of such popular magnitude had to be neatly abandoned before the public itself lost interest in it. This was it: EVA DROUMEK ARRIVES.

Nevertheless, it was not the end. There was another story, the true one. To find it, Pulmer needed more facts, proof; but he had no training which would help him. He was not a detective.

He loitered at the airport, divided in himself between the truth as he recognized it and this great deception. He saw the civil servant depart; and a little later Eva Droumek was driven away in the direction of London in a large car.

At ten minutes to four, Pulmer got into his car and returned to the newspaper office.

### 3

The newspaper was owned and printed by a squat, gruff little man of fifty-eight who was also a jobbing printer and stationer. This was Jennington. He had three old printers to help him, and the four of them worked in a long glass-roofed shed behind the untidy, crammed little stationery store. There was one other employee, the editor,

a quiet lanky fellow of thirty-five named Herdson who effaced himself in bouts of drunkenness half the week and in hard work for the rest of the time. Pulmer found him intelligent, well read, and agreeable, and he enjoyed assisting him. The six of them compiled all the material, printed and published it, collected the newspaper's extensive advertising matter, ran the printing business, and attended to the thriving, untidy little shop.

The three old printers were jocular, lewd characters, fond of certain allusions which they shouted to one another above the rattling of their machines and which they augmented with their glances and their shrill, concerted laughter. Pulmer had been here a year. He saw that the entire business was a sea of muddle, dust, and litter through which the others plodded on complacently, always publishing the newspaper punctually thrice weekly. His own more diligent attitude seemed to amuse them, particularly when he referred his appointments to Jennington for approval.

"Shall I cover this Flower Show?"

"That's right, sonny," Jennington said, hoarsely, "keep the rain off it."

"Cover yourself with glory, young feller!" one of the printers shouted.

Returning from the airport, Pulmer wondered what would be their reponse to the true facts of this story of Eva Droumek's arrival in England. In the untidy little office which smelled of dust, wastepaper, printer's ink and hot wood and oil, Herdson was at work. He glanced at Pulmer when the latter entered the room, and sitting back in his chair he waited with obvious expectation of some conversation from his assistant.

"Had a nice day?" he said.

Pulmer had drawn up a chair to the table and kicked



aside the accumulation of trampled wastepaper from beneath his feet.

"I'll explain what happened, when I've written the report," he said.

He wrote two versions, and passed them to Herdson. The first was the sort of thing which readers expected to see. The second ended with these words: "Let us be quite certain that in matters such as this reason is not foundered by hysteria and prevented from guiding us. Much as we admire those who appeal to our charity in the name of freedom, we can only preserve our own freedom by making certain that persons to whom we grant political asylum are not the enemies of liberty."

Herdson sat back in his chair and read the first one. He put it aside and read the other, after which he turned to Pulmer with a look of amazement.

"What are you trying to suggest about her in your second report?" he said, solemnly.

Pulmer hesitated for an instant. He said quietly, "I think the whole affair is a ruse of some sort."

For almost a minute, Herdson stared at him, no longer in amazement, but with a fixed look of lively but serious attention which troubled Pulmer with its intimations of gigantic processes beginning in this humble editorial office and extending across the world to reverse Eva Droumek's story.

"How did you come by this information?" Herdson said.

Pulmer shook his head. "I haven't any information."

Herdson was silent for several seconds.

"I give you my word I won't divulge it, if you wish," he said.

Again, Pulmer shook his head. "I have no specific information."

"But you must have, since you say the whole story is false."

"I have no—evidence, proof."

"Do you want us to publish this second report of yours?"

"Certainly," Pulmer said.

"Then can you substantiate it, if we do print it?"

"Not with actual proof. But once the thing is in print, I am certain it will explode her story and disclose the true facts."

"Do you realize what you are saying? What you are proposing?" Herdson said, calmly.

"I suppose I am suggesting something which is against all the traditions of journalism," Pulmer said.

"I should say you are! And against all reason, and fairness, and common sense, as well!"

He leaned forward. "On what do you base this idea of yours that Eva Droumek's story is a ruse?"

"Look at the whole thing dispassionately and objectively as it stands," Pulmer said. "Many refugees have been in far worse plight than she is. Actually, except that the Czech authorities wanted her sent back to them, she isn't in any sort of plight. She has supplies of foreign currency. She has a couple of suitcases, and some fashionable clothes on her, and she's brimming with good health, vitality, and self-confidence. She put up at a de luxe hotel in Stockholm. . . ."

"The two young fellows who piloted the light plane were murdered. I think she was in grave danger all the time."

"Murdered by Communists?"

"There is no proof, but . . ."

Herdson shrugged his shoulders. Pulmer smiled.

"Quite! But she wasn't murdered. She came through. I

tried to check the sources of her story. I didn't get far. It came from the usual very reliable correspondents who gave it to the usual agencies."

"And you can be absolutely certain that they handled it only after satisfying themselves that the facts were true."

"Of course the facts are true! No doubt, if I were able to go to the press agency in Prague, I'd find that Eva Droumek was a teacher of languages who was opposed to Communism and who found two young men, pilots, who were ready to escape with her by plane. We all know the facts, and they are there for anyone to examine. And we all know that they have provided one of the best human stories against Communism for some years. It's not only a good story, but it is good propaganda against Communism. If it weren't, it would have been nothing but six lines tucked away in a corner of a few newspapers."

"Possibly."

Pulmer went on, "And that's why the ruse has worked. The whole thing: the actual adventures of this woman, and the story of them—it is bait. A great piece of bait . . ."

"Which thousands have swallowed, except you?"

"I have seen her, and spoken to her, and had a chance to study her, during the press interview today. All smiles and allure and posed. Those attitudes and expressions belong to the facts of her story. But in the flesh, without the smiles, and without the poses, she belongs to something else. The hook concealed in the bait! Just think: the whole story is watertight. Select any fact in it, and it is verifiable . . ."

"And those are the only appearances that count," the other said. "Yet you are prepared to fly into the face of them, without a shred of evidence that can prove them false!"

"Yes."

Herdson regarded him in silence for a while.

"What do you suspect she is?" he said, quietly.

"I don't know," Pulmer said. "A Communist spy. A party official—an agitator—sent here on a secret mission. But the point is this: my version of her is absolutely supported by the facts of her story, provided one sees her as—well, what I believe she is. A Communist agent of one sort or another. It was the whole, headlong acceptance of her story that made me skeptical about her. It has the hue of a Communist device. And when I saw her, she was so much a part of it; the embodiment of it, and somehow not at all identifiable with the woman thousands of people have in mind from her photographs and her adventures. The two women born out of this story are completely different to each other."

"And your version is the authentic one?" Herdson said.

"I haven't a shred of evidence to prove it, but I'm convinced of it."

"You expect me to publish it, and have the big news agencies hammering at our little door here; and when they say, 'What information have you? What game are you up to? The story we handled is genuine,' all I can say is that our Mister Pulmer has a notion that you were wrong!"

He smiled patiently. "Nobody enjoys being proved wrong, let alone being contradicted without proof. And you know, Pulmer, they would jump on you, and on the boss and me, very hard, as soon as they heard you had no information to support your suggestion."

He paused reflectively. "Why don't you speak to the appropriate government department about your misgivings?"

"Like you, they would ask for evidence," Pulmer said.

"Everybody will," Herdson murmured.

Pulmer shook his head. "Editors might. But the public wouldn't. They'd swing right around and demand that her case should be checked and double checked."

"Surely, it must have been, before she was allowed in!"

"But the officials have allowed her to remain here!"

"Which shows that they are completely satisfied that she is above suspicion," Herdson said.

"Obviously, they had no more facts to go on than editors had," Pulmer said. And he went on to tell Herdson about the civil servant who was a Communist and whom he had seen at the airport.

Herdson smiled. "That's pretty feeble evidence."

"I suppose it is. All the same . . ."

"You know, you don't seem to take British Intelligence into account, Pulmer. If she's at all suspect, they'll know of it. There is a great deal happening about which the public is not told, nowadays. You know the sort of thing. Not in the public interest to discuss or divulge. You are like an onlooker who has caught sight of a game in progress, perhaps. And you know how annoying it is to the players when an onlooker tries to advise one of the players about the other."

"But this isn't a game," Pulmer said. "It's a kind of battle. And a serious, deadly one."

Herdson said, "Civilians aren't welcome on a battlefield, or at headquarters."

There was silence for a time. Then Pulmer said, "The Communists are waging a new kind of warfare which makes the whole world a battlefield; and this ruse of Eva Droumek's is an example of the new method of warfare. Psychological warfare. Manipulating the minds, the emotions, of people."

"Very possibly. And if that's the case, I feel quite sure that our own Intelligence . . ."



"Lets her come in!"

"Possibly. Strange things are done, nowadays. But I am the last person to interfere between two opponents."

He rose and took up Pulmer's first report, saying, "We'll carry this one. And take my advice, Pulmer. If you still feel worried about things, report to Scotland Yard. Or get on Eva Droumek's tracks."

"I can't see myself doing that. Informing, and playing the detective," Pulmer said.

"Then the only logical thing to do is to forget her," Herdson said, going out.

Pulmer put away some office files and tidied the table before sitting down to correct a wad of galley proofs. One of the old printers came in with another bunch of proofs for him to attend to. Leaning across the table, he grinned at Pulmer.

"Did you see her? Proper juicy little eyeful, isn't she? Judging by her photographs."

He made an outline with his hand, and winked.

"I wouldn't have minded having your job, today," he said, chuckling. And clapping his hands together, and rubbing them briskly, he went on giggling and winking. It exasperated Pulmer. He said nothing. His self-reproaches ended. His impressions and suspicions of Eva Droumek increased. He wished that he had had the courage to make inquiries at the airport and learn where she had gone. He sat back in his chair and wondered what he could do next.

## 4

Of the scene for which Eva Droumek was bound. Of her confederate who was a ministry official and who had spent last week on official business in Sweden and returned to England on the plane by which she had traveled. Of this man's wife, Edna, now awaiting her husband's return.

During the past week, Charles had written from Sweden to tell Edna that he expected to reach home shortly after one o'clock on Monday afternoon. The plane from Stockholm was due at noon. There was a possibility that it might be delayed by adverse weather. In that case, he would phone from the airport as soon as possible after his arrival. Edna smiled when she read this. Like all such information from him, it was the fabric of deceit.

In the tasteful flat which was their home, she prepared lunch for a quarter past one. At a quarter to two, she sat down alone to the meal. An hour later, she telephoned the air terminal at Kensington and asked if the plane from Stockholm had arrived and if her husband had been on board. She was told that it had landed shortly after mid-day and that Charles was among the passengers.

The information had a curious effect on her. Previously, she would have been vexed because Charles had neglected to phone to her; or perhaps slightly worried. Now she was neither angry, annoyed, nor apprehensive. At the moment when she had replaced the receiver, all the habits of mind which she had formerly applied to Charles' behavior, and all the little pretenses which she sustained



so as to escape the truth about his character and to maintain the picture of marital success, failed at last, disintegrated under the accumulated burden of similar moments, and were rejected by her as being futile and useless.

She recognized the truth about him with an equanimity which pleasantly surprised her. She had no regrets, no misgivings. The facts which she had refused for so long to admit were now accepted by her. It was a relief to feel that she need never again delude herself about him. He was a liar, a hypocrite, an indefatigable self-seeker, and a deceiver. And having acknowledged all this at last, after refusing to do so for several years, it was comforting to know that the series of lies which Charles invented to explain his unexpected absences, delays, broken promises, deferred engagements and forgotten appointments in the scope of his private life, would never again vex her.

She sensed an altogether new direction in his life. He was like the victim of a phantom will that urged him towards daring ambitions that were already obsessing him. More and more of his leisure was consumed, along with his depleted integrity. Knowing him so well, she believed that she knew to what pursuits he gave himself. She could absolve him from commonplace deviations. His vices were not those of the flesh but rather those of the world. His expansive, genial temperament, and all the gifts of his spirit that had previously characterized him, had been diverted towards material ends. He was supremely good-humored. He wore a mask of charm, liberality, sympathy, tolerance and understanding. It took him a long way.

Tall, lean, active, he was forty-three. Eleven years her senior. During the ten years of their married life, he had gained material success at the expense of elements in his character which she had loved. His ready sympathy, his

generosity, his gaiety, still flowed, but only at a price which he stipulated. He demanded allegiance to himself and his ideas; he wanted popularity; he expected opportunities. He was willing to give friendship and everything of its loyalties in return for still more opportunities. He was clever and capable, and he had advanced in the esteem of his chiefs. But in all this activity he had lost a particular virtue which had endeared him to Edna in the early years of their marriage. She might admire him because he was trusted and esteemed by ministers, under-secretaries, parliamentary secretaries, and other officials; but he was lost to the old aspect of himself.

In 1947, they had come from the suburbs to this flat in the West End which he had furnished under her tasteful choice. The contents of the house in Carshalton had gone into the bungalow in the New Forest which he had purchased with the proceeds of the sale of the suburban house. That was the first example of his talent for manipulating their material resources. Later, she realized that he was adept at making such deals and gaining a quick, high profit. He knew so many people, up and down some sort of newly established scale. He did not scruple to take risks of many kinds. He went with a wind of dubious morality, and he became an opportunist.

It was as an opportunist that he invited to the flat people whose views and personalities she found repellent. People of crudely assertive character who listened with an almost malicious silence when she spoke. And the fact that he was their acquaintance seemed to her to place him at a distance and to encompass him in a murk which she could not penetrate to discover the exact activities denoted by such contacts. She suffered them for two or three hours, made her discreet criticism of them to him, and—as was her habit—never again alluded to them.

She had her own life, and there was nothing of it which Charles truly shared. It was too passive, too contemplative to interest him. But it fulfilled her. The new books, the new plays, the exhibitions of art, the concerts and recitals, the ballet and films; and, whenever Charles was abroad, her little dinner parties to which Bertha and Fawley came to help entertain a few young novelists and poets who were beginning to be published.

His attitude to all this was that of a disinterested but tolerant spectator. He never criticized it or condemned or disparaged it, although it had always been plain to her that he resented Bertha's friendship with her. It was a friendship which had endured from a past which, possibly, disturbed him to remember. In her friendship with Fawley there were, on her side at least, feelings that would have justified Charles' reproaches. But if he was conscious of them he ignored them. With Fawley, he was invariably genuine. Between this prominent young research chemist and Edna he quite possibly saw only as much as Fawley himself rendered to the friendship, which was founded on nothing more than an interest in music and literature. Sometimes, however, she noticed the faintest tremor of a smile upon Charles' lips, and his glance touching her with something of the old kindliness and intuition. Then it was as though his dulled perceptions had come alive and he had seen how much she was committed to Fawley and how little Fawley gave of himself to this relationship.

Charles, at such times, not only displayed a considerate tact that was almost tender, but seemed to her to reveal unconsciously the distance which he had put between himself and her. Nothing could have betrayed that distance and his preoccupation with his own affairs in it more than his discreet approval of her friendship with

Fawley. He approved of it not so much for her sake as for his, because it gave her life the fullness which left him free to pursue his own projects.

Pondering all this while she waited for him to return, she sat on the wide window seat and opened the windows overlooking the deep courtyard of the apartment house. The June afternoon was very warm. The mumble of the city's traffic was muffled by the heat of the yellow sunlight; and the sounds that came from Curzon Street and the flats above and below hers seemed to lose impetus in the heavy, motionless air and to dissolve into tremulous fragments melted by the triumphant heat that shimmered above the concrete courtyard and the brickwork.

The muslin curtains stirred a little. In Curzon Street, a passing car changed gear and whined away into the numbed distance of afternoon. In one of the flats opposite hers someone was playing Debussy Preludes. She listened eagerly at first, forgetting her spoiled afternoon, her errands left in abeyance. Presently the music, and the sudden, discordant noises from the street, became merged in the heat, the stiff sunlight, and the drowsy pulse of the afternoon. Then it was no longer disquieting to feel that her life was threatened with the necessity of adjustment to the new, personal conditions implied by Charles' persistent deceptions. Slowly, she removed her hat, shook loose her light hair, and sat inert with her arms along the window ledge.

There was, at last, nothing that need be discussed with Charles. There were no cards to be laid upon the table, no conditions to be promulgated. She did not doubt that he had hoped for her to arrive at this realization of facts. In her gentle fashion, she blamed herself for having forced him to utter excuses that were lies. A remnant of genuine kindness in him had perhaps withheld the harsh truth de-

fining the distance which now separated him from her; and no doubt with patience he had waited for her to appreciate the disparity of their lives. He had not tried to impose on her passive character the difficult necessity for making a hasty and positive decision. She had, as it were, emerged at her own pace from a kind of mist into sunlight.

From this sense of detachment, it was curious to see Charles standing in the doorway. She had not heard him arrive home and come along the passage to this room. She was still encompassed so safely in her own space that his sudden advent did not startle her. Moreover, for the first time within many years, his presence did not arouse in her presentiments of imminent disasters bred by his character that had always threatened the tranquil pattern of her life. She felt very secure in her own, private world from which it was easy to smile at him in response to his genial, rather effusive greeting.

He had put down his suitcase and tossed his hat to the nearest chair. He smiled broadly, standing so erect that he seemed taller than usual. There was something strangely exultant in that smile of his and in his silence. His hands were extended to her as he approached her. She rose swiftly to her feet, to defend her new security, for slyly, deliberately he was violating a kind of pact which had existed, unspoken, between them for two or three years. This homecoming was unlike all previous ones with their casual exchanges of greetings, their quick embraces, their brief sparkle. And it was quickly apparent to her that he had demands to make upon the semblance of marital harmony and loyalty which she had been at pains to create in the past.

Her spirit recoiled, for in his eyes, his smile, his extended arms, and his pretense of devotion to her, his guile



was visible. Her heart flagged. She stood rooted in apprehension, inert in his arms, submissive but inwardly repelled by him.

"Darling, I'm so sorry! Your spoiled afternoon," he murmured, contritely.

He held her. He kissed her cheeks and patted her shoulders. Then for a few seconds he was silent. It was the pause after the prologue.

"Had you a good trip?" she said.

But he seemed not to have heard her. He drew back to arms' length, his hands heavy and warm on her shoulders, his large, deep-set eyes beneath the bushy brows so watchful, so full of cunning. She tried to smile, to disengage herself from his gaze and his hold.

"Forgive me, darling," he pleaded. "I tried . . ."

"I had nothing very particular to do," she said, blithely. And with a sharp movement she freed herself from his hands, noticing at once the collapse of his broad smile into the contours of his large features, and the instantaneous and startling droop of his expression and his attitude. As though she had delivered him a blow.

But that, too, was the end of yet another phase of an especial deceit of his. Until, in the succeeding instant, she saw fear glimmering in his sagging look, and knew that he was checked halfway through his deception and compelled to approach her in an altogether different fashion.

"Have you had lunch, Charles?" she said, going past him.

She halted at the door and glanced back at him. He had not moved. He was rooted in some hot little crisis of his own.

"It's ready for you, if you wish," she said.

He swung around heavily.



"Oh, don't bother, my dear, thanks. Some tea—a cup of tea will do."

He followed her into the kitchen.

## 5

When she opened the refrigerator, he accepted eagerly the salad which she offered him. Holding the dish on the flat of his hand, he used a fork, cramming his mouth while he stood opposite her.

"You haven't had anything to eat since breakfast!" she exclaimed. "Have you?"

"A snack on the plane," he said.

"But the plane landed punctually . . ."

He shot a glance at her.

"Didn't it?" she added.

She checked herself. The old habit of trying to elicit the simplest details from him in order to compel shape and regularity on his habits was still strong in her. She turned aside and plugged in the electric kettle.

"You really should try to make sure that you have proper meals, regularly," she said. "If the plane landed punctually, you've had plenty of time to have lunch."

She moved about him, gathering things for the tray.

"I fully expected to be home by one-fifteen," he said, through a full mouth. "We were delayed."

It appeared to amuse her.

"What was it this time?" she said. "Landing gear?"

Her tone puzzled him. It was no longer unsuspecting. It was that of someone who was in possession of information concerning his activities. He was sure of that. Her peculiar manner when he had arrived indicated her concern, her disapproval of certain facts. And now, her mocking tone. As though—yes, and her accurate information about the plane's arrival—as though someone had explained everything to her and she were taunting him with his perilous situation. He was frightened; not of her but of greater consequences from other directions.

"No, no," he said, blandly. "Something . . ."

"Port engine?"

He shook his head. Nervousness made him grimace.

"The starboard one?" she went on, briskly, running through the catalogue of his former excuses, making fun of him.

He grinned. Her mood was easy to enter. It was what he had hoped for.

"You'd never guess, my dear."

"Oh, must I guess, this time?"

His confidence returned to him. He put down the empty dish and took up a table napkin. Dabbing his lips, he said, "That woman from Prague—the political refugee—was on our plane."

He dropped the table napkin on the dresser, thrust his hands into his trousers' pockets, and lowering his head strolled casually towards the door.

"Quite a flap when we arrived. Press people to interview her and photograph her. And a bunch of Home Office chaps to interrogate her. The rest of us were not allowed to disembark until all that was over and she had been checked through."

It was perhaps the first truthful excuse which he had made for months. She turned quickly to him.

"Eva Droumek?"

She was immediately intrigued and off her guard. He saw that he had disarmed her, and he faced her, nodding.

"Delayed the rest of us . . ."

"What's she like?" she said.

His thoughts held to their course. He had method. He had a plan of action, and now that he was embarked on it, he was not to be turned from it. He could manage Edna as expertly and plausibly as he did far more difficult persons.

"There was an almighty fuss," he said, feeding her curiosity.

"What about? The newspaper reporters interviewing her?"

He chuckled. "A large crowd of them. But I meant the interrogation after that. If she had been a criminal, it couldn't have been more exhaustive."

"How silly! And the other passengers—you all had to wait in the plane until . . ."

"No, they let us out after the press business. But . . ."

He had reached the crux of his story. He drew a breath and went on warily, trying to give his tone ease and lightness.

"The trouble, of course, was that she hadn't a passport or visa, except something or other which was given her in Sweden. She had the seat next to mine, during the flight. She told me about herself."

"I read about her, during the week. She doesn't look the sort of person—at least, judging by her photographs—who'd let difficulties . . ."

"Yes," he said. "A very level-headed person. But she told me that she was afraid she'd be sent back. She had no passport, no—friends here, nobody to sponsor her."

"Surely, that wouldn't mean that she'd be refused en-

try? How could she have got a passport and visa in Prague? Why, it's absurd. . . ."

He grimaced and made a gesture.

"Regulations. However, I felt that the least I could do was to offer assistance."

"How?"

"Technically, she has more or less entered the country illegally. I offered to do what I could to help her. The chief trouble was that she knew nobody in England, and had no sponsors."

"She's not going to be deported, is she?"

"That remains to be seen."

"Really! But it's obvious, isn't it, that she's quite genuine?"

"Of course! But regulations are regulations. However, I did what I could. I got into touch by phone with—two or three people."

The kettle boiled, and for several seconds he lost her attention while she infused tea. He paused.

"Go on," she said. "With three people. Who were they?"

"Oh, people in authority. They were rather dubious at first. All the public clamor—that sort of thing is so tricky. I suppose its face value . . . Anyway, I was referred to another quarter, and from there I got permission to—more or less sponsor her and . . ."

He took up the tea tray. "Let me." He followed her into the lounge.

"Sponsor her?" she said. "What exactly does that entail?"

He sat in the armchair opposite her. It was always difficult to extract information from him. His thoughts were so cumbersome, and he had a habit of treating all conversations as though they were great tracks of uncharted land through which nobody, and least of all himself,

should proceed without first of all clarifying the various individual purposes. He liked to discover them in other people, but he concealed his own, seldom answered directly any question, and ponderously digested almost all statements.

He accepted the cup of tea which Edna passed him; and after offering the pastries to her, he selected one for himself and pushed it into his mouth.

"Sponsor?" he mumbled. "A question of her domicile."

He sipped his tea. His glance went to her above the rim of his cup, furtively. Then he smiled, as he always did when he wished to cajole something from her.

It was so transparent. Suddenly, she sensed again his guile. He had slyly enticed her this far, and she tried frantically to extend her sensitive perceptions to interpret the course of his remarks and the triumph in his smile.

With an uneasy haste, he said, "It'll be quite all right, my dear. I assure you. She's . . ."

Then he stopped abruptly. But his smile continued like a separate thing over which he had no control. It remained there, escaped from him, while beneath it his uneasiness clouded his eyes and held him rigid and silent. It revolted her, and she turned her head to avoid it.

"I offered . . ." he began; then he paused, and with a little laugh he said, "You asked what she was like. You'll be able to see for yourself."

She put down her cup and folded her trembling hands. What troubled her was not the invitation which he had extended to Eva Droumek but the purpose of it. She knew him too well to believe that the invitation was given impulsively and from charity and sympathy. Such motives were dead in him. Others had taken their place. His darting glances had nothing of his amiable blandness. He was plainly tense and apprehensive. And already she was try-



ing to grope with the shapeless substance of suspicions which his behavior engendered in her.

His smile vanished. He spoke with an unfamiliar softness. "I invited her to stay a week with us."

He seemed to rise from beneath a burden and to acquire courage. His voice took volume.

"It seemed the best course. Having agreed to sponsor her, I felt—but, of course, I had to get permission. It was tiresome, as you can guess. She was most grateful. But I wanted to tell you . . ."

He spoke in a quick, jerking fashion, and paused to make a plausible gesture, adding, "It's for you to say, my dear. I leave it to you. If you have the slightest objection to her visit . . ."

Then he waited, his whole attitude one of cajolery beneath which there slowly appeared the shadow of the dilemma which frightened him. He was pleading with her to extricate him.

"Objections?" she exclaimed, softly. She gave a slow shrug. "When do you expect her?"

He flushed a little. For some reason which she could not guess, he appeared surprised. His eyes blinked.

"If I had any objections," she said, "it's rather too late to mention them."

He leaned forward. "No, it isn't. I assure you . . ."

"When is she coming?" she asked, curtly.

"Any moment now."

"Then, obviously, I can't very well say no, can I?"

"But you don't wish to, do you?"

He seemed to gulp back his anxieties and doubts and to abase himself in that pleading air.

"If you feel it'll be very troublesome . . ."

But what he was all the time stressing was her own re-



mark: that it was now too late to raise objections, that at any moment now the visitor would arrive.

He had always done that. Presented her with situations that were already shaped but which he pretended could be amended at her request.

"No, no, very well," she said, shrinking, as always, from anything more positive than that, unable and unwilling to define her feelings and opinions in a way that might give them finality.

Instantly, relief blossomed in his face, in his large presence. There was no mistaking it. And with it, there was satisfaction, as well, in the way in which he relaxed after the efforts he had made.

And those efforts. To further some plan of his. To approach her slyly, to treat her as if she were nothing more than an obstacle to his plan. The whole thing so heavy, so portentous, and yet concerning no more than an act of charity and generosity to a stranger. But, of course, it was not charity or generosity! Such things, with their kindred expressions, were no longer altruistic in him. He demanded his price for them.

Pondering it all swiftly, she groped to determine for what purpose, what gain, what price this stranger from Prague had been invited here. All the subtlety of her deft sensibilities aspired to inform her. Suspicions mounted in her mind. And cohered in a single idea. She retarded it for an instant, and then admitted it. The invitation given to this woman—it had some murky relevance to his declining integrity, his dwindling respect for her and for his own conscience. And with the prescience which so often operated in her contemplative mind, she felt the pressure of ideas that took shape from his behavior now and during the past year. Cohering, they emitted intima-

tions of some perfidy of his which, were she prepared to confront it, might instantly and completely reveal itself.

But, as always, and for the sake of hope, she restrained her suspicions. She rose from the settee.

"I'll make the spare room ready for her."

"No hurry. Besides . . ."

He passed his cup to her to fill again.

". . . no need to go to any trouble."

She hesitated for an instant. When she took his cup and sat down, it was like an act of submission which he had exacted from her. He knew so well how to do that. And, before that, how to disarm her, cajole her. But this time it was for something far more significant than some clandestine business that took him out for an evening. This time, it was a hazardous matter, involving a woman from Czechoslovakia, a political refugee carried by a wave of public sympathy which seemed to end here, in this flat, and to present her as someone implicated in the dubious motives that rendered Charles so nervous and so unsettled. The ring on the doorbell sounded like a warning to her.

She rose at once. But he was on his feet and halfway across the room before she had time to take a step.

"I'll go," he said.

And presently she heard him at the door of the flat. A transformed personality. So genial, so fulsome as he welcomed the visitor whose lilting voice conjoined with his to make for a moment what seemed to be a prearranged duet. Edna could not repress a soundless laughter which ended when the voices ceased. She faced the door, hearing now an underlying hardness in the woman's voice, and a tone of insidious, perfected understanding between the two of them out there in the passage.

Eva Droumek appeared an instant later and halted in

the doorway. And in the boldness of her dark gaze and the pertness of her attitude, and the streak of coarseness that remarked her determined personality, the phantom that had obsessed Charles' life for the past six months was embodied.

Her presence answered every question that had tantalized Edna during that period. The anxieties, the fleeting and painful conjectures, the misgivings and fears, were gathered and confirmed for Edna who stood with her hands joined and her body rooted in outrage and her cold, indignant eyes unable to render anything to this stranger except a challenge of recognition and contempt.

With Charles behind her, Eva Droumek advanced warily as if she hoped that proximity to Edna might relent this difficult encounter. Pausing, smiling, she gave Charles the merest glance.

It was like a signal acquainting him that it was now his turn to speak and act. He came forward. The uncertain gesture which he made as a preliminary was like something which he had scrambled together from the dregs of his courage.

"My dear," he said, breathlessly, "this is Eva Droumek." To Eva, he added, "My wife, Edna."

He waited for Edna to respond. She did not move. Despite her own surprise at herself, she was prevented from responding as he wished her to. An inner compulsion was stronger than his, now that he invoked the laws of hospitality; and she dared not condone the huge offense which lurked in him and this woman. Frozen in herself, she gave the visitor the merest inclination of her head and a frozen, void look.

He couldn't believe what he saw. The heavy silence which had its source in her seemed to extend quickly and possess the entire room. It was like a substance which bore

massively upon him. His hand, raised in a smooth gesture, sank limply. He knew that he should have been indignant, but instead he was conscious only of the fact that he could no longer deceive her.

He heard himself speaking pleasantly. "Miss Droumek and I met on the plane from Stockholm. You have read of her adventures, Edna, haven't you? Happily, she has permission . . ."

It was all ineffectual. He was chattering, trying to entice Edna to relent to him and to Eva whose bright face had suddenly taken an appallingly revealing pallor through which her smile flickered uncertainly. She flung her gaze at him.

He failed her. His chatter broke down, gathered itself, stumbled along and ended suddenly under the devastating idea that Edna had at last overtaken him and shattered the web of deceit which he had cast about her to keep her at a distance. He realized that she was ahead of him, suspicious of him, unable to respond as he had imagined she would, and thus defeating in a single instant the conception of plans that had taken months to perfect. Unless he could elude her now, abolish her doubts that had mounted so heavily and so formidably. But to his look of disapproval and entreaty, she gave him nothing but a glance of pitiable distress that seemed to plead with him for the truth.

Released for that instant from the stricture of her gaze, the visitor broke in resourcefully. The few seconds of dismay were so soon ended.

"You are so very kind to allow me . . ."

Edna interrupted her. "You must be very tired after your long journey. I expect you wish to unpack, and rest."

It was not unkind, but it was like a command. It was

not what the other had expected. So much success so far had encouraged her to believe that she could continue in it, unsuspected. Elation at her progress had buoyed her exhausted nerves. But this perilous encounter at the moment when she had expected a warmth of welcome was bitter with the indications of doubts that were already suspicions that promised defeat. She made another effort.

Blithely, with her dazzling smile, she shook her head. She glanced with vivacious admiration at the tasteful room.

"No, not tired. Very happy—very much . . ."

Her glance slid down to rest on Edna. Its speed and force broke there upon the cold edge of contempt and the suave movement which Edna made as she went past her.

"Your room is this way, Miss Droumek. Come, and I'll show you."

Lamely, Charles interjected, "Perhaps—some tea first."

Neither of them appeared to have heard him. Edna crossed the passage and opened the door of the spare bedroom and stood aside for the visitor to enter.

Eva Droumek had snatched up her cases from the passage. She came marching in briskly, her heels thumping the carpet. At the dressing table, she put down her cases and standing with her back to Edna, she placed her handbag near the mirror, drew off her gloves, and turned slowly round.

"Would you care for some tea?" Edna said.

Miss Droumek went towards her. Perhaps, even now, there was still a chance—to persuade this simple but formidable woman to yield. To snatch from her the truth, and by some flash of compelling talent fill the role of refugee in such a way as to . . . But the hope and the half-resolve were flung back at her.



"It's ready, if you want it," Edna said.

"I think," the other said, slowly drawing her gloves through her fingers, "I am giving you much work."

Her head with its heavy mass of hair tilted to one side. There was a pout of self-reproach on her face.

"You needn't speak of it," Edna said.

Without a word, Miss Droumek turned aside and drew off her beret. Holding it in her hands, she looked down at it with an air of indecision and distress. Slowly, as though discouraged and grieved, she dropped the beret listlessly. She opened her handbag and took out her handkerchief, dabbing her nose with it, sniffing audibly.

Edna turned away. "You're tired, I expect," she said.

She did not see the dark head nod and sink lower, or notice how the handkerchief was applied in turn to each eye.

"You might like a warm bath," Edna said. "I'll run it for you."

She went out, closing the door behind her. At once, Eva Droumek straightened herself, crushed the handkerchief back into the handbag, and stood frowning at her reflection in the dressing-table mirror. She heard the bath water splashing. For that much, she was grateful. She removed her light coat. To bathe, to rest . . .

But Edna's indignant, hostile reception of her which so bluntly and candidly told her that she knew . . .



# 6

It was unforeseen. It was disaster of a kind which nobody had anticipated. Everything else had been considered thoroughly, patiently, for almost two years. The great ruse had been perfected step by step, from one stage to the next, with the most meticulous attention to detail. She had believed that it was founded first of all in her ruthless, strong spirit, as well as in the constant features of human nature which she planned to manipulate.

When she had been summoned from scientific work of the highest importance and, after special training, been assigned to a dangerous mission in the field of espionage, she had approached the task as though it were a scientific problem. As, in fact, it was.

As a research chemist of the front rank, a member of the Academy of Science, thrice honored for her contributions to several subjects, she did not hesitate to tell the little committee which was formed to help shape her plans, "Given three years, and a reliable staff of chemists and physicists, I could present a conclusive thesis, instead of taking it in its entirety from . . ." and here she laughed, ". . . from this English chemist, the Doctor Fawley."

It was pointed out to her that the object of her assignment was to discover not only the scope of Fawley's thesis and the processes whereby his discoveries were being utilized in British Government laboratories under his control, but the precise subject of that secret work of which, at present, and in spite of the efforts of secret agents, nothing was known. She felt inclined to reply that from what

she had read of the sensational, but scientifically barren, press reports concerning Fawley in Western newspapers, she could make a good guess about the subject of his work. In simple terms, she could say that it was related either to metals or to food. But she said nothing. The members of the committee were no more than clever espionage agents, and there was the usual political commissar's representative, to regulate everything according to the party doctrine. None of them could speak the language of science.

It was, therefore, all the more satisfying to her to apply herself to the acquisition of a complete, accurate image of Fawley. The information was voluminous. The subordinate agents in England who were already appointed to assist her were led by a man named Vort who was a former Gestapo officer, and his principal assistant who was a former sergeant of the Red Army and trained by Military Intelligence. Both operated under cover of their jobs as representatives of a firm of German exporters. With them, they had a very clever English woman who was an ardent Communist and who acted as their typist. Vort had reported favorably about her. But the information which these agents had collected said so much and yet was threadbare. She had the impression that Fawley had either eluded them or else was protected in some way by British security officers. Only a few relevant details emerged. The rest was trivial.

She read that Fawley was a single man and that he had no home. He traveled a good deal, probably from one secret laboratory to another. So far, these sites had not been located. The authorities of one of the colleges at Cambridge had given him rooms there; and although he did not appear to have a laboratory in that city, he stayed

there frequently. With the professors and their families, whom he sometimes visited, he was no more than a friendly acquaintance. In fact, he seemed to have only two friends, and these were a civil servant and his wife. The man was in the senior grade and, with his wife, occupied a luxury flat in London's West End. Fawley was a frequent visitor.

Information concerning this civil servant was much more comprehensive than that relating to Fawley and his colleagues. And as Eva Droumek read it, the image of this man grew clearly in her mind.

His character was a blend of weakness and charm; geniality, knowledge, organizing ability, and all the gifts of the clever official had a duality in him. He was trusted. He was efficient. At the same time, his private life was a progression of roguery. He indulged himself by entering black markets as an operator. He had been the brain in a successful and cleverly concealed smuggling enterprise. And Vort and his assistants had discovered as well that this man had a finger in several lucrative activities that were just a little outside the law. Obviously, the man was clever, adroit, and self-seeking. And weak. Yet, at the same time, possessed of the curious strength of the reckless.

She saw him so sharply. He was such an instrument, standing as he did in that friendly relationship to Fawley who, obviously, knew nothing of his clandestine, illegal activities. It was exciting to contemplate him, and to realize that as a means of entry to the perimeter surrounding Fawley he was the perfect instrument, with his attractive personality, his cunning, his character that was already seduced by greed and perhaps by a love of power.

She made her decision and informed her committee.

She asked for this man to be enticed into Communism and to be taken into a local branch of the party. When that was accomplished, she would request that he would be offered the task of assisting her to enter England as a political refugee who would become a guest in his home. His wife—the report referred to her as being a negative personality, simple in her habits, complacent, and contented with her round of theaters, cinemas, and ballet performances.

The members of the committee were aghast. This man, this disloyal, weak character, self-seeking, to be invited . . .

“Seduced,” she said.

The word horrified them. But she explained. The process would be easy. Already some of his colleagues were Communists and members of the party. Without being told why, it must be put to them that he must be enticed to join them. The usual approach must be changed and given in the form of flattery. It must be put to him as an intellectual matter. He should be made to feel that the best intellects were joining the Communist Party.

In the end, she had her way. The process took an entire year. It was one which was more of flattery than of ideological substance. Charles, when approached by colleagues who were Communists, was subjected to tactics that put an insidious pressure upon his weaknesses. His intellect in which, had it been encouraged, there might have been some strength, was hardly evoked. The appeal was all the time to his self-esteem and his reckless ambition and his greed. He was given the impression that Communism was an advancing reality, already dominating half the world, and soon coming to power in the remaining half. He was told that he in particular was needed, and that—like certain colleagues who were

crypto-Communists—he would be given an important position when the time came.

At last, when he was a new member of the party, and before he had time to waver and resign, he was offered a particular role by an influential member of the Executive who had the authority to convey it. Charles was not told the nature of Eva Droumek's mission; and none of his fellow-members knew that he was chosen for this part. No specific reward was offered to him, except a subtle one which reminded him that he was trusted by the party abroad, and that already he was regarded as being worthy of an eminent position.

His progress amused Eva Droumek who had a slight disdain for all but the most emphatic of foreign Communists. Their behavior seemed to her to be psychopathic. As with their Christianity, they never quite yielded to the discipline in which the seed of belief was contained. And Charles—he was the same. But when it was suggested to her that he should be liberally bribed, she was vehemently opposed to the idea. The man was not a fool. A bribe would give the affair the character of a mere criminal enterprise. It must be kept upon another level, so that Charles would imagine that she was coming to England to visit secretly the various local branches of the party as an emissary of the Central Executive.

There was one last point, and this he himself answered for her. She had asked him, through intermediaries, what was his wife's attitude to his conversion to Communism and to the prospect of a special visitor. His reply remarked that Edna was in ignorance of his affairs, was tractable, complacent about most things, absorbed in her own pursuits, and unlikely to refuse hospitality to a political refugee.

She seemed an insignificant person, and yet perhaps



incalculable. Neither for her husband nor against him. Detached and, of course, not likely to denounce him if she discovered that he was a Communist.

For almost two years, Eva Droumek had gazed from her rigid world at the scene into which she had now projected herself. She had seen it from one viewpoint, with one purpose, confidently, encouraged by intermediate successes. Now, at the instant of her entry into it, it swung out of focus. Disaster lay in ambush for her and sprung its trap. In the privacy of this flat, there was not the particular relationship which Charles had said existed between himself and his wife. Eva Droumek realized that at the moment she encountered Edna. There was this wife who, finally disillusioned after months, perhaps years, of his sly behavior, had become suspicious of him and taken her stand against him and his guest. And he—so nonplussed, so surprised by her refusal to respond as he wished, that his confusion had been only too apparent. It had betrayed him. She knew—this wife of his knew that he and his guest were pursuing a subterfuge.

Eva Droumek was too much of a realist to deny these facts. Nor did she misinterpret the situation which had arisen. She knew that Charles could not quench his wife's suspicions that were born of a flood of accumulated doubts that had been too much confirmed by him for her to forget them. And here, because this was the address at which she had permission to stay for a week until her case was reviewed by officials, she must remain, beholden for food and accommodation to a woman who saw her more as someone who had affinities with the unworthy features of Charles' character than as a refugee.

It was defeat shaping already in what should have been the heart of success. Disappointment filled her. Anger against herself, Charles, and Edna, grew swiftly to a



fury of chagrin and impotence. Her exhausted nerves that had expected a respite, a relief, the stimulus of success at this stage, were bruised by this fresh pressure and the demands that were added and presented to her by Charles' discomfiture. Seated at the dressing table, she rested her arm on the warm wood and sank her throbbing head on it.

It was a relief to weep. They were tears of rage, frustration, rancor against Charles, hatred of Edna. But they were consistent with her role of a political refugee who had endured protracted perils. She refused to accept the idea of defeat, or that she was weeping from disappointment and despair. Her distorted features emitted a heat of resolve. She scoffed at the setback. She would go on. The tears were nothing but part of the pose, the role.

But she had no choice in the matter. The decision to continue as Eva Droumek, the refugee, was a necessity. She was snared. Ten minutes previously, how attractive had been her part. Now it was like a heavy garment, a thing which—although both of them must know that it was spurious—she must continue to wear before Edna and Charles. She had to smile under it, act with all that brisk winsomeness, to avert defeat. And already defeat and failure were in the air.

Being a realist, it was reality itself that now obtruded to define her as Edna saw her: a woman who had invoked and then deliberately manipulated the natural sympathy of multitudes of ordinary people in order to betray it, and who was now prepared to accept hospitality from a hostess who was to have been the victim of a calculated deceit.

It alarmed her to discover in herself this stern, reprov-ing voice which defined her betrayal of a fundamental, natural law which she had invoked. A multitude of commonplace faces crowded her mind's vision with an

identical expression of stunned realization of the cruel deception which she had practiced. And she was horrified to recognize in that expression the same look of realization and reproach which had bloomed on the faces of her two companions—two authentic refugees—when, turning upon them in the darkness of that narrow alley, she had fired bullets into their hearts.

She pressed her hand firmly over her open mouth to smother the cry of horror. The panic soon passed. The faces dimmed and disappeared. She was in this dainty bedroom. There was the silk coverlet, the soft carpet, the sunlight placid upon it. A scene devoid of the elements which, because they were dead in her, no longer had power to transform this room, this flat, Edna, or anyone else into figures, places, wherein she could carry success.

Somewhere among her belongings, in handbag or suitcase, there were tablets to numb the tension of mind, the tortured nerves. If she could summon the will and the energy to move.

Somebody tapped on the door and entered the room. She lifted her head and felt grateful for the living presence.

"The bath is ready," Edna said. "And you'll find warm towels in the bathroom."

In Edna's slight features, there was no reprieve for her. And in the firm, quiet tone of her voice there was still no softening.

"If you wish to go to bed immediately after your bath, do so," Edna said. "I'll bring dinner to you on a tray."

"Thank you," Eva said, rising. She caught at the opportunity. She contrived to smile.

"This is the most wonderful moment of my life," she said, loudly, letting her voice rise. "I am truly happy to be here after my long journey."

It was the rehearsed remark. It should have been augmented with her famous winsomeness, her clasped hands, her joyous postures. It was late, yet she offered it with a hope that it might present her as one misjudged, baffled by that harsh reception, hurt, yet genuine.

"Don't let your bath go cold," Edna said.

When the door closed behind her, Eva opened a suitcase and took out a small bottle of tablets. She swallowed two of the tablets with a little water from the carafe. By the time she had undressed and put on her bath wrap, the drug had taken effect.

Then almost dispassionately, it was possible to look again at the facts. But not for long. The languor induced by the drug obscured failure, defeat, Charles' innate stupidity, Edna's strength. She thought only of the soothing bath, the rapture of sleep and forgetfulness amidst cool, white sheets, the respite for her taut nerves.

## 7

When Edna returned to the living room, Charles was standing at the window. He had removed his jacket and was slowly running his right hand over his head, while his left hand rested on his hip. It was the attitude of a perplexed man.

Lighting a cigarette, Edna sat on the settee and drew the month's *Vogue* towards her. She was wrestling with terrifying ideas that were bred by the reality of Charles' presence and that of Eva Droumek, and their behavior. If

not a refugee—then someone connected with Communism—a party member—agitator, spy. And Charles—an accomplice?

Eva Droumek's feet thumped on the carpet in the passage as she went to the bathroom. Marching feet, suggesting the obedient ranks of herded millions under a handful of leaders. First the Fascists, then the Nazis. And now—others.

Charles' tall body sauntered towards her. Sinking into the chair opposite her, he extended his legs, crossed his feet.

"I'm sorry, darling," he said, contritely. "I should have phoned you before I invited her. Not sprung her on you."

For a moment, she was unprepared. She could not adjust herself to his mood. It was another deceit. She was aghast.

He made a little pout at her. "Angry, darling?" he said.

She slowly closed the periodical. Indignation and disgust prevented her from speaking. His voice edged through her dismay.

"The point is this," he said, lowering his tone, "as I explained to certain people when I phoned them." He went on speciously: "I wouldn't have dreamed of asking her here, but for the fact that—the point is this: here is a woman of intelligence who has seen through a regime which has much more to it than we in the West can realize. It's with those factors that she was in—in conflict. A woman of intellect and sensibilities. And, moreover, a person who—and I soon discovered this much from conversation with her—a person who has kept her eyes open and has been able to gather a great many facts of a specific kind that—that are invaluable to . . . And also—an experienced linguist. . . ."

It was all so unconvincing and banal that he himself could not believe it. He was silent. He had come to an end in himself. This miserable attempt to resurrect the abominable ruse had failed, as the ruse itself had failed. Inert and baffled, he faced her with a despondent air, mumbling, "I'm sorry, darling. I should have asked you before inviting her."

As though that were all he need say, and all she need think. But she knew what was imminent. He had lost his way. He could not proceed, nor could he extricate himself. He knew that she had an inkling of some unwholesome project in which he was involved with Eva Droumek; and that every attempt which he made to reassure her only betrayed him. And when, at any moment now, he reached a complete realization of his position, he would collapse finally and abjectly.

He would put himself into her hands. She would have to listen to the miserable confession of things which her apt imagination hardly dared to consider. He would plead with her to solve the whole problem, and while she was thus entangled, he would escape.

She longed to discover what enterprise involved him and Eva Droumek. Her heated suspicions flared in so many directions. But she eluded them. She gave him sufficient pause wherein to recover himself, then she said, curtly, "You said a week, didn't you?"

"Yes, it'll be a week. They asked for her to be domiciled for that time, while they . . ."

"Certainly no longer," she said, rising.

She knew that she had flinched from a scene, and that she lacked the courage to confirm her suspicions or to be enticed out of her own space by this adversary, and then find her retreat cut off by him. She and Charles were thus back upon familiar ground. Both of them tacitly acknowl-



edged the necessity for preserving the façade of their marriage in this false harmony. The rest—she was resolved not to speak of it.

He got up and took from her case beside the tray one of the three cigarettes.

"I must get cigarettes," he said, taking his jacket from the arm of the settee. She remembered seeing the flat box of one hundred cigarettes jutting from his raincoat pocket in the closet along the passage. She said nothing.

Buttoning his jacket, adjusting his tie, he had followed her into the kitchen.

"I forgot to tell you," he began, jerking his head towards the bathroom. "About our guest . . ."

His voice dropped to an undertone. "I was going to tell you . . ."

"Must we discuss her?" Edna said.

With an apologetic air, he said, "I don't think I told you that there are conditions attaching to her visit to us."

He summarized them briefly. She hardly listened to them. They were conditions that seemed to her to apply to a suspected alien from an enemy country. Something about a five-mile limit, and not to be absent between the hours of . . . And her supplies of currency impounded except for seven pounds. What struck her about them was their application in face of Charles' permission to sponsor Eva Droumek.

"I thought you said you had sponsored her?" she said.

"I have."

"But these conditions—putting us . . ."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"Oh, never mind. I suppose . . ."

"They are formalities. Until her case has been reviewed."

But her own doubts and qualms had infected him. He



suddenly asked, "Did you mean that she isn't quite . . ."

He stuck there. And she, too, was instantly prepared to avoid the issue. She couldn't admit to the sanity of her personal world the words that fell like the first ominous and tentative drops of rain from a storm cloud. Spy—traitor: they were the relevant words of circumstances so remote from her life. They kept falling from the looming mass of apprehension in her mind. She imagined that he, too, heard them.

"No, I didn't," she said, indifferently.

"Then what did you imply?"

"Well—that neither you nor I appear to be trusted by the persons who gave her permission to come to us. That's all!"

She was irritable. She shrugged her shoulders.

"You think it reflects on me—and on you?" he said.

He was trying to smile, trying to appear unconcerned. But she kept silent. She felt that henceforth every conversation would return deviously but inevitably to this pregnant subject.

"A formality," he mumbled, turning away.

He had not reassured himself, or her. The truth of events hovered above them. They knew it but dared not admit it.

## 8

He left the flat and went down in the elevator. He had told Edna that he was going for cigarettes, but he had come out to make the telephone call which he dared not put through from his study. Hurrying from the building and pausing for an instant in the street, he wondered what information he should give to the pompous, unique personality—a combination of impudent adolescence and cold maturity—who, from the first, had been his guide across such new territory.

A sentence had been prearranged. "Thanks for the prescription." And it was understood between the two of them that Eva Droumek was to be referred to as "the patient." Nothing had been devised to cover such an eventuality as had occurred. Failure, in fact, had not been discussed. Indeed, except for two lengthy meetings last autumn, when he had been taken to "the Doctor," as he was styled, his interviews with him had been brief but exacting. He had been given much advice. From the curious, alarming point at which he now regarded events, he realized that the advice was in reality a complex series of instructions. Nothing at all about what must be done in the event of failure. And certainly not a word of instruction to assist him through such a dilemma as the one that now encompassed him.

He strolled without haste towards the call box ahead of him. He wanted advice, but he was surprised to find that he dared not ask for it. The dilemma in which he found himself and which so perilously involved Eva Droumek

was from some disparity of character between Edna and himself. He could neither confess it nor discuss it with the Doctor. Yet, not to disclose it was certainly dangerous.

He had come out with a vague belief that he still could dispel Edna's suspicions. The pressure of those suspicions was nowhere active out here, in this sunlight, this light and space. Hope and confidence filled him. But only for a brief time. Only until he came opposite the call box. He halted. Then he strolled on.

They were not suspicions. They were the truth. With her cool, gentle eyes she had always recognized the underlying truth, the authentic nature of situations, people, conversations. Detached, in her own tiny cosmos which he had always known was a complete thing, she had eyes, ears, and some subtle gift of perception that appraised everything.

To admit even that much was to give ear to his conscience. At once, it poured out its lament, its reproaches, its stern and terrible indictment of him. He halted again. The hot sunlight, the glare of it from walls, windows, pavement, hurt his eyes. He was suddenly dazed by the simple, familiar reality around him. And his own place in that reality? His duty, his responsibilities as a servant of the Crown? His authority, his knowledge, and the trust reposed in him by his chiefs?

For the first time he realized what he had done. Betrayed so much. Betrayed himself. The part of him which knew that by becoming a crypto-Communist he was a traitor, and that by accepting an accomplice's part in this business of Eva Droumek he was—a worse criminal.

It stunned him. But he had known, all along, he had known that it was wrong, dangerous, stupid. And yet it had been so much a part of him that it had given him

satisfaction, like a garment that was perfectly apt and which somehow expressed his character. It was criminal, it was not moral, when he engaged in certain deals and conducted swift little "markets," and organized neat enterprises to smuggle into the country certain articles, and to smuggle out others. Yet it never gave his conscience a pang. It was so right for his character, his temperament, his personality. It was the kind of expression which his character, temperament, personality, had always sought.

A reward, a method of gaining something tangible, worth-while for itself, useful. At home, amongst the family, always a reputation for his considerate behavior. At school, a reputation for unselfishness, for bartering, for leadership, resource, kindness, amiability; but not much for teamwork or studies.

At university, notorious for his joker's attitude to important matters, popular as a scamp and a shrewd chap. Loyal as a friend, but expecting loyalty in return. Expecting something for something. And the same, later on, when he went to an appointment. An attractive personality, liberal, charitable, happy, and soon very popular. And somehow on such immediate terms of intimacy with people who were his counterparts. With them, it was so easy to drift into a deal, with a few words, a message to someone, a telephone call. But, abruptly, an amendment, or so he thought. An end of that sort of thing, and with it the belief that Communism had taken him clean out of that life.

He had entered it cautiously. He had been determined not to be beguiled by any vaunting statements. He wasn't one of the sheep, or a disgruntled, stupid, semi-literate laborer unable to comprehend anything properly. He was prepared to discuss the subject upon an intellectual level. Not for him the transparent propaganda in the

Communist newspapers. He wasn't prepared to liberate any "wukkers" from "cap'lism," or to put right nebulous "wrongs." He waved aside copies of the *Daily Worker*, manifestos, bulletins. He wanted the ideology, not the dope.

He was, of course, much influenced by the fact that there were so many crypto-Communists everywhere. In the Church, the professions, industry and commerce, and among his own colleagues. In schools, colleges, universities, and in the public administration departments, and in hospitals, clinics, committees. People of fame and repute. People said to be of intellectual stature.

It was while he was admitted to knowledge of the presence of these people in the Communist Party that his seducers presented to him a vision of Communist purposes and achievements. He was shown his world in what seemed to be its shabbiness and degeneracy and make-shift systems. He was enticed to see it as a muddled, hopelessly confused and effete thing that simply must give place to the natural forces of human progress already coordinated in Communism. And his own life, for instance. Was it not deprived of its proper opportunities by the patched, outworn systems that so heavily confined the nation and the individual? And, like so many other permanent officials of the civil service, did he not secretly realize that until those theories and the systems bred by them were abolished there would never be progress? And was it not true that many enlightened economists had said that? Very well, then. Why not concede that it was necessary to plan for a better world and give one's thought and energy to the only forces that could fashion that new civilization?

It was put in such a way as to appeal to him. And when he was interested to the extent of wishing to discuss it



with a party member of the Executive, he was taken to the personage referred to as the Doctor. The house—large and well-appointed—was near enough to Harley Street to dispel the suspicion that its occupant was not a fully qualified medical practitioner. But the plate on the door remarked nothing more than the name and the word: PSYCHOLOGIST. And upon being admitted, Charles noticed at once the handsome receptionist, the two elegant young women dressed as nurses. . . .

He walked on a short distance. He tried not to think about the Doctor. His present problem concerned only himself, Edna and Eva. But the image of the Doctor obtruded in his thoughts. The smooth, childlike little face; the neat little head, bald except for some sparse yellow hair flat on the crown; the languid eyes, and the volume of disdain heavy as a narcotic in the static, lethargic features. A disdain for the whole world. And monstrously incongruous to that slight, youthful body. . . .

And then, at the instant when revulsion began, there had come the man's brilliant smile, his curiously mannered and old-fashioned greeting, so that Charles no longer felt horrified and revolted but was reminded of the Doctor's extraordinary fame. Those savagely incisive letters to the press, always concerning faults in "the structure of human society." His book, something about Man and God, which had sold in thousands of copies and created a literary sensation and which several eminent clergymen had publicly denounced and thereby only publicized. And his public retort on the platform of a hall packed to full capacity, and the sensational praise instantly bestowed upon the man and his book by young reviewers.

"I have been told so much about you," he was saying to Charles, "and have so often wanted to meet you."



His dry little voice, clipped, cold, unnatural. A bizarre personality, promising so much, hinting at possibilities for Charles, flattering him. And later on, more flattery when he chose Charles as his sole accomplice in a project which, when completed—and then more hints of rewards.

But the whole project, at this moment when it was in such dangerous motion, was interrupted by Edna. Her cool presence, her knowledge! Her distance from him, and her ability to sustain her morality. Overtaking him, she was there not to further this project but to condemn it, prevent it.

And he knew that that was what she would do. For her own sake, for his as well, she would do what she felt was right. She always had done. She might flinch from arguments and discussions, but her actions expressed all the quiet force of her virtuous character. Even with Fawley, a young man to whom she was very much attached, her behavior—almost amusingly discreet. But in this issue, it would be supported by more than convictions. Necessity, material necessity, would back it.

He turned back, abruptly. He was hurrying home, to verify it all, to watch for the least hesitation. . . .

But he knew she would give him no chance to elude her. She held all the cards. He was bankrupt. His world had been strung with delusions. His foundations were in the ingrained degeneracy of his character which had never been taken in hand. He had existed on false notions of himself, of other people, of Edna. This was his first real defeat, and it felled him. Disillusionment, fear, weakness, changed his whole outlook. He recognized the authentic Edna, the truth about himself, the Doctor, the others.

Out of the glitter of sunlight, a beggar waylaid him, sneaking up to him, touching his arm, the matchboxes in

the grubby hand thrust out to him. Charles shook his head and edged aside.

"No, no . . ."

The face, the ragged figure, pressed closer, nimbly, invading sight, filling the space wherein there had been so much fear and self-reproach.

"Box o' matches, sir? Buy a box!"

Merely to get rid of him, the hand was thrust into the pocket, a hot hand, clammy with perspiration, drawing out coins. But the face under its dirt and grease, suddenly transformed.

"Everything going well? The patient arrived? Settled in?"

And while Charles stood speechlessly, he took the pennies, thrust a box of matches into his limp hand, and went on, "You can trust me. I'm around to help. Never far off, if you should want me. My orders, you understand."

And shuffled on, leaving Charles limp and affrighted and somehow enmeshed. He remembered—cigarettes—the phone call. And he crossed the road and purchased cigarettes in a shop and came out to hurry back to the flat, to Edna, to Eva, to the great perils that had to be confronted, negotiated.

When he entered the elevator, he felt safer. In the flat, he could go on, trying, hoping, searching for an instant of hesitation in Edna's behavior. For a week, seven days—and then—the permission, the formality.

He opened the carton of cigarettes while he strode through the flat looking for Edna. She was in the kitchen and had changed into a flowered silk frock over which she had put on an apron. She was preparing dinner. He realized that the maid was out for the evening. His thoughts raced feverishly. Later tonight, her return, and

Edna's remarks to her. A guest with us. Miss Droumek.

"By the way, my dear . . ."

He closed the door and lit a cigarette.

"About Mary."

He tried to appear casual. "I'm wondering . . ." and with hands in pockets, and his head averted, he strolled around the kitchen, adding, "We don't want—our guest's visit here publicized, do we?"

He avoided her glance by taking up a kitchen measure and studying it.

"I know we can rely on Mary to say nothing. But—a word of caution might be useful. We don't want a stream of reporters from tiddly newspapers, or people buzzing the phone day and night."

"If I ask Mary to be discreet, I'm sure she'll say nothing," Edna said. "She's . . ."

"Oh, quite! Thoroughly, strictly reliable. But it's not only that."

He ventured to look up at her. Lowering his voice, he said, "Between the two of us, Edna, I must tell you that there is . . . I mean, the point cannot be ruled out . . . The possibility, and I stress that it is remote but nevertheless still feasible, that our brave little woman in there might be . . ." and here he permitted himself to smile faintly and grimace ". . . less deserving of our hospitality than either of us is inclined to imagine. I'm not suggesting for a moment that she is other than what you and I believe her to be. And it would be unspeakably unjust to suspect her of being anything but a brave little woman. I don't want you to think that I have any doubts about her, or that I am heartless enough to think there is a possibility . . ."

"Charles!" Edna interjected. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Please, dear, let me finish. I was saying: personally, I consider her absolutely honest, and I should refute most emphatically any suggestion that she is not what she has said she is. Possibly, her personality may seem rather aggressive to some people, but it must be borne in mind that circumstances have forced that attitude upon her. She seems hard and rather coarse. However, the point is that official sources might find cause to—well, let's be candid with each other and say it. This cold war which is at such a pitch now. One cannot altogether dismiss the possibility that this woman is, or might become, shall we say—of doubtful . . ."

He gave a little shrug. He was not really master of himself. He was too much under Edna's intent gaze.

"What does all that rigmarole mean?" she said.

He saw that she was bewildered by it, and irritated.

"What are you trying to tell me, Charles?"

Her anger increased. She was trembling with it. It had taken possession of her and given her a reckless courage that rebelled against him.

"First you say one thing, then another! First you invite her here, and try to tell me she is to be pitied. Then you hint that she is not to be trusted. And the way you stood there with her, when she arrived—do you suppose I am blind and stupid? The two of you! If I didn't know it before, it became obvious then. Spurious! A fraud! Is that what you are trying to tell me now?"

This was the moment, the very edge of everything. He lifted his hands a little way and then dropped them limply. He awaited whatever she had to say next.

She could not go on. The next step would take both of them into the morass of an impassable territory. She held back, and in a voice that relented slightly to him, she

said, "You were talking about Mary. What did you want to say?"

He snatched at the opportunity. It wouldn't grant him a reprieve, but it would yield an armistice between them.

"When is she having her vacation?"

She said reluctantly, "I have promised her the first fortnight in August."

"Hm. I wonder . . . I wonder if you could change it and let her start tomorrow."

"She has made her arrangements. She is going to stay with friends, early in August."

"Couldn't you—give her an extra week, beginning tomorrow?"

"Will you tell me why, precisely . . . so that . . ."

He answered her distressed air with a pretense of patience.

"To avoid a lot of unwelcome publicity, as I said."

"Charles, Mary is a completely trustworthy woman . . ."

"Quite! But to avoid the slightest risk—surely you could give her an extra week's holiday."

"At a time when we have a visitor?"

"There is that, of course. But—leaving that out for the moment, couldn't you—to safeguard . . . I mean, to avert a lot of possible publicity which neither of us wants . . . Couldn't you explain . . . Say that we are going away ourselves for a week? Something like that."

"I am not going to lie to Mary. I prefer to treat her as she deserves to be treated, and as I know she behaves to us and others."

"Quite, my dear! As you wish. But you will impress on her . . ."

She had resumed her work. "It won't be necessary. She is a discreet woman."



After a pause, he said, "Of course." And without another word, he went slowly out.

She wasn't misled. She saw through it: the sly attempt to dupe her, to make his position safe, to deny his accomplice. But he had failed. She had made it clear that she knew. She dared not say more than she had said. She was not in conflict with him to see him reduced to shame or to exact from him a confession and its unhappy contrition. She was fighting his character, his cunning instincts, the shifts and devices to which he still clung. She longed for him to yield them. She wanted . . . but except for his release from those wretched habits, she could not give a shape to the volume of painful thoughts that swept over the affair and harvested only regret. He was beaten. Whatever advantages he was anxious to gain rested with her. He was not clever enough to realize it or wise enough to capitulate.

But the advantage, and what to do with it? His behavior in its attempts to recover that advantage made the whole situation more difficult. She could not yield what she held. Yet it burdened her, for of course she must not only retain it but act upon it. But how, how?

The bell rang. She went to answer it. Bertha! She could not recall an occasion when she had been more glad to see her and to have her large presence interposed between herself and a problem.

## 9

When the bell rang, Charles was seated in his study. He rose hastily, like a felon prepared to resist arrest. And in that shameful attitude, he waited until Edna opened the door. Then he sat down again, the moment of panic leaving him bruised and ashamed. His imagination that had always carried a splendid picture of himself was now a fearful sentinel darting back and forth and raising alarms at the least sound. While he, with his hands clasped tensely, accepted a new and truthful identity, and the circumstances which involved it. The splendid image was dead. When Edna had said, just now, that Eva was a fraud, that fallacy of himself had finally collapsed.

Yet the arrival of Bertha momentarily encouraged him. Bertha, instead of detectives, officials, or somebody from the Doctor. That beggar, for instance. That being from the reality of a world of cunning, bitter emphasis, which bracketed international impacts. But the Doctor . . .

He lifted the telephone receiver, and while Edna and Bertha passed along the passage into the living room, he made the call.

"Thanks for the prescription."

"When did it reach you?"

"An hour ago. It will do admirably."

"Thank you," the clipped voice said.

That was all. The Doctor rang off quickly. Charles felt that he was being treated with scant courtesy. He missed the encouragement which he had hitherto received, and a sense of isolation—deliberately imposed by the Doctor—

troubled him. He stood up. From the living room came the sound of voices. He opened the door and went noiselessly along the passage. Edna and Bertha: he could hear them distinctly. The usual chat.

"I could never use it all, myself. I thought you and Charles might like a good cut of it."

And then Edna: "What is it?"

"Look! Salmon. One of my customers—a sweet old dear from Scotland—brought it, this afternoon."

"Bertha, that's a huge cut! At least three pounds."

"Three! It seemed like ten, lugging it in this heat from Hampstead. Cut me a small portion, and you and Charles keep the rest."

"My dear, you don't know how grateful I am. I've been wondering what to give them . . ."

"Have you visitors?"

"Just . . . one. You'll stay to dinner, won't you?"

"I'll have a drink with you, but I won't stay, if you don't mind."

"I wish you would, Bertha. Please."

"I'm sorry. I've a hundred and one things to do at home."

"I was going to phone and invite you."

Bertha laughed. "Is this a gala night?"

"Hardly! Charles returned from Sweden, this afternoon. He brought a visitor. Someone he met on the flight home. Eva Droumek."

"The woman who . . ."

"Yes. It appears he . . . got permission from someone or other to sponsor her and invite her here for a week until her case has been reviewed."

"Typical of Charles!" Bertha exclaimed. "Always so obliging. What's she like?"

"Completely exhausted."

"Poor thing! And I suppose the first you knew of it was when Charles arrived with her?"

"She came a little after he got back."

It seemed to amuse Bertha. "Aren't you thrilled? You don't seem very enthusiastic."

"I'm not."

Then a pause, followed by Bertha's subdued words: "Why not?"

Charles heard the door close. Without hesitation, he tiptoed to it and listened.

"In the first place, Bertha, I'm afraid of . . . Oh, all the publicity that might begin. Newspaper men and women trying to interview her, trying to telephone. The whole place in an uproar all the time. And then—so many conditions, which make me think that the authorities aren't so ready to believe all the sensational rubbish which has been published about her. And so you see, what with the . . ."

"Yes, of course," Bertha said, gravely.

". . . the newspaper reporters probably trying to find where she is, in order to get more of her story and her future plans, and the authorities perhaps doubtful about her . . ."

"Not a very pleasant situation at all."

"How I'm to prevent people discovering she is here, I don't know. I simply don't want Charles' name, or mine, coupled with hers, in case it turns out that she's . . . bogus."

"Oh, my dear, Charles isn't the sort of man who would sponsor someone who wasn't genuine! He has his wits about him, and his position to think of! Besides, he wouldn't have got permission to bring her here and sponsor her unless it was felt that she was genuine."

"No, of course not."

"Then what are you perturbed about?"

"Just the—the possibility of . . ."

"But you've seen her. If she were a fraud, you'd get some inkling of it, wouldn't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, what did you think of her?"

"She's tired out. I . . . took her straight to her room and told her to take a warm bath and go to bed."

Bertha said, "But what's your opinion of her?"

"Don't let's talk about her. I'm just worried about how to keep the thing out of the newspapers, and how to prevent people finding that she's here."

"I wish I could stay to dinner, but I can't. I'd like to take a look at her."

"That's why I wanted you to stay."

"But in any case, I'm sure she's . . ."

Edna remarked something in a whisper which Charles did not overhear. But Bertha's gusty retort echoed out to him.

"Oh, Edna! What nonsense! She couldn't be! Why, that's a cruel thing to believe about a woman who fled from Communism! How can you believe it, when the whole world knows that she's begging for sanctuary?"

And then Edna's nervous little laugh. "Oh, well, it's . . . just that I'm worried about what might happen. But don't let us talk about it. Come and talk to me in the kitchen, while I prepare dinner."

He had time to hasten into the large bedroom before the women came from the living room and entered the kitchen. The door closed behind them. He heard the sink tap running, and the voices chattering blithely above that sound and the clatter of dishes.

He thought for a while. Edna . . . he knew she dared



not say more than she had. She wouldn't remark more than that. Nothing about him. She was held there. It was as clear to him now as it was to her: that an ultimate disgrace, a scandal, the likelihood of his arrest and indictment, would involve her. And to prevent that she would protect him. But Eva?

He entered the passage. As before, the voices were joined in brisk conversation. He did not hesitate. He opened the door of Eva's room and went in.

She was lying on her side in bed, facing the door. He noticed at once the steeply pronounced curve of her hip. The short, white arms were bare and resting outside the bedclothes; and her hands were open and lax, with the fingers small and sharp, like evil little tendril tips.

Evil. He was startled by the sharpness of this single impression which her recumbent body made on her. He stood watching her from a distance.

Her eyes suddenly opened wide and were instantly charged with vigilance. The transposition from sleep to consciousness was instantaneously achieved. It was the faculty of a wild creature or savage. And like a wild thing surprised in sleep she watched him without moving or speaking but with every sense and nerve tensed. He took a step towards her.

"What do you want?" she said.

Her tone had a weight of anger and contempt which fell heavily on him. He answered it with his own anger, making an imperative gesture for silence.

"Don't hide yourself in here," he said, in a whisper. "Get up. Dress, and come into the room with the others."

"I shall stay here," she said, brusquely. "Your wife has seen enough of me and has nothing to say."

"You mistake her natural reserve for something else."

She sat up with a suddenness that frightened him. The violence in that movement seemed to threaten him. He drew back involuntarily. Then she smiled disdainfully.

"She understands you," she said, derisively, "as well as she understands me. But as for you, you have never understood her. You did not think for a moment that she was a clever person . . ."

"You're quite wrong," he said.

She threw back the sheets and got out of bed. The flimsy nightdress was made more negligible by the swift, lithe movements of her body which gleamed at him in its dazzling whiteness and its hostile, careless attitude. And the careless abandon of its sensuous nudity, crowned with the untidy, tumbled mass of her dark hair, and flung at his sight with such contempt for his manhood, insulted him more than her words.

"Don't tell me these lies!" she exclaimed.

It was like a command which defined their relationship. She was pushing him aside, blaming him for their failure, deserting him as he had deserted her. Malice and contempt and hostility ran between them, fouling what had seemed to him to be the clear stream of their association. For an instant, while she flung past him and snatched her gown from a chair, he was morbidly abashed. In his own home . . .

Before she could speak, his temper took hold of him.

"Be careful what you say," he said. "And what you do."

She was furiously scrambling into the gown, tugging the sleeves, her face distorted with rage.

"Nobody told me that your wife despises you. You did not know it yourself. Now you do. Now she has . . ."

"Be quiet!"

And to the look of utter amazement which she poured on him, he said firmly and harshly, "She is just as anxious

as I am to avoid trouble. That's all that I need say about her. Now listen to some advice. People here are not as simple as you think. Here, we have had no serfs for seven centuries. The individual quite often thinks independently. You had better attempt to justify the sympathy you have won. Dress yourself and come and meet . . ."

She had turned her back on him and gone to the bed. There, she sank back on the pillows and stared up at the ceiling.

"Go away," she said, sighing.

"Dress yourself quickly and come out."

He spoke curtly, and turning away he left her and tip-toed to his study. He appreciated that the wisest course would be for her to remain in bed and plead exhaustion, but he was impatient to hasten some process which her proximity to Edna, and her meeting with Bertha, would assist. The mood, the persuasive charm, the insistent, unyielding air of a genuine refugee. And to make a beginning while Bertha was here. To create a favorable impression on Bertha. To exact from Edna a note of good will which, alone with Eva, she might not be able to find in herself, but which with Bertha nearby she might strike and find easy to maintain long afterwards. It would not be difficult.

In his study, he braced himself for the meeting with Bertha. He must find the apt tone, anticipate her remarks, strike a convincing air. He left his study and opened the kitchen door.

"Bertha!"

He had never liked her, and he sensed that in her heart she disapproved of him. They were alike in many respects: size, personality, expansiveness. Yet he knew that the comparison which was invariably made when they were together favored her. She was sincere. She was finer

material. It was obvious to anyone who saw them together. He knew it and was always irritated by her visits.

But for once it seemed to her that he was genuinely pleased to see her. His greeting was not full of the usual false humor. His smile was there, and his hand cupped her elbow with an intimate caress which was like a part of his dangerous charm. But his whole manner was quieter, and more reasonable.

"You're looking very well, Charles," she said. "What was the trip like?"

She spoke in a tone which matched his. For the first time in their long acquaintance with each other, he felt that he had misjudged this large, capable, sensible woman.

"Oh, the usual thing," he said, seriously. "Bargaining. Discussions all day and half the night. But all very amicable. And not without interludes."

"I've never been to Sweden," she said.

"You should go there, Bertha," he said.

"I'd very much like to."

"I'll recommend a good hotel to you. If you do go, let me give you letters of introduction to several people," he said.

He was conscious of so much friendship in her which he had rejected and which was still awaiting him. He felt suddenly in need of it and of the courage and strength, the positive character of it, and the good sense which activated it.

"Do you see this, Charles?" Edna said, pointing to the salmon.

For a moment, he suspected that she had deliberately interrupted this first authentic conversation between himself and Bertha because she resented it.

"Salmon!" he said. "This is sumptuous!"

"A present from Bertha," she said.

He realized that she was struggling to achieve the easy note, the exact key which had always carried the theme that they maintained between each other. But she failed. He was depressingly aware of a reservation, a frigidity of tone in her remark. He tried to ignore it.

"Bertha, this is . . ."

He laughed nervously. Bertha said, "It cost me nothing, Charles. One of my customers made me a present of it. I'm taking a slice of it home with me . . ."

"But you'll stay to dinner?"

He pleaded with her. His words raced off his tongue.

"Nonsense! Of course you will. I'll run you home, afterwards, in the car. Besides, we have a visitor . . ."

"Yes," she said, as though he had confessed to a misdemeanor, "so Edna has told me."

"Stay and meet her."

"I'm sorry, Charles . . ."

"Well, let's have something to drink."

He followed them to the living room. Standing at the cabinet while he opened the bottles and poured the drinks, with his back to her, it was easy to glide smoothly into conversation with her. He had so much to gain from her. If he could detain her until Eva appeared, and by keeping his head and not faltering send her away convinced that Eva was genuine . . .

He understood the influence which she had always had upon Edna, and the admiration which Edna had for her scrupulous virtues. A woman of moral integrity. But appraising her now, seeing her as someone whose opinions Edna trusted and who would be so valuable to him were he able to induce in her the belief that Droumek was a



genuine political refugee, her character was clear to him. It was founded not so much upon a deft conception of right and wrong as upon a warm, energetic common sense. Unlike himself and certain unworthy persons whom he knew, she had no blind spots. Like her big presence and her lively gaze, her common sense was alert and far-sighted enough to discern the inner stupidity of evil. And he knew that he could never make an ally of her.

She was saying of Eva Droumek, "I don't understand why there is so much fuss about her. Before, during, and after the war, I had refugees working for me who had reached this country after suffering things that I thought were buried forever in the pages of history. Any of their stories would make hers appear like a sporting event. I don't see that she is such extraordinary news value, Charles."

He handed drinks to her and Edna on a tray, and took his own glass to the window seat where he sat down and extended his legs, saying, "But the fact is that besides flying from Communism which she hates, she is also making . . . taking a spirited stand against it. A fighter. Intelligent, educated, and a personality, and yet—what one could term coarse. It struck me as soon as we got into conversation on the plane, this morning. The coarse streak in her. But it's explicable. One doesn't do what she has done—conduct, single-handed, a duel with Communism at the level at which it was taken, and emerged without being transformed in the process. And that is the feature of her character which has resulted in so much fuss. Her tremendous ardor!"

"For what?" Bertha said, calmly.

It made him pause. His words had been running away with him, and he had felt so confident of his ability to

delude Bertha. But her shrewd gaze was driving itself at him.

"An ardor of conviction," he said. He put his glass to his lips and drank. "Such an ardent conviction in herself and her hatred of the regime."

Both women were watching him intently. He paused for an alarming instant. His thoughts swerved. He wondered why the women were staring so hard at him. Had he said something that was patently untrue, false? Had he betrayed himself?

"For two solid hours, she described . . ." he began again. Then the power of speech deserted him. Bertha had slowly and almost disdainfully turned her head and exchanged glances with Edna. And Edna, in silence, had put down her glass and looked at him with a cloudy reproachfulness. He couldn't go on. Casual as it had been, that withdrawal of her gaze from him by Bertha had dismissed him as a liar, a creature of treasonable purposes. And all that she suspected in him was verified by what resided in Edna's expression.

Yet both of them had turned to him again. It was a mere gesture. There was nothing else they could do. He tried to smile, to pick up the dreadful threads of his falsehood. He extended a hand.

". . . she described heatedly her loathing . . ."

He knew that he was only increasing the evidence of his deceit. His conduct was transparent to Bertha. And suddenly there stood in Edna's expression a frown, a look of exasperation and pleading which he dared not ignore.

He let his arm drop. He rose.

"But you'll see for yourself, Bertha . . ."

He glanced at his wrist watch, and walking briskly to the cabinet he put down his empty glass.

"You're not going for a few minutes yet, Bertha?"

"Charles, I mustn't stay much longer."

"Ten minutes. I must bathe and change, if you'll excuse me. Let me give you another drink."

"No, thanks."

He turned to Edna. "For you, darling?"

She shook her head. He strode from the room, his remark streaming like a pennant in the wind of his nervous retreat: "Don't go yet, Bertha. Ten minutes . . ."

## IO

In the bedroom, he tugged the clothes from his clammy body. He had blundered again, as he had done in so many instances. For years, he had disparaged Bertha's character. Now he appreciated its moral force which she could convey in a devastating glance. His attitude to Edna had been just as stupid. There, too, he had underrated what was formidable: her astute perceptions; her sensitive intuition. Now he was gleaming the results of his folly.

He sighed unhappily. With his gown around him, he hurried into the bathroom. The mat lay creased and sodden on the floor. His slippered feet trod in broad puddles. Two big towels, both of them very wet, were left on the floor. The bath water had not been drained away, and the cake of soap was left in it.

He opened the drain, straightened the mat, put aside the saturated towels, and stamped off for fresh ones. When he returned, he ran the hot tap, shed his gown and

stepped from his slippers. He tested the water's temperature. It was cold. Eva Droumek had emptied the hot tank.

He swore angrily. But after the first immersion, he lay at full length and relished this coolness after the day's heat and the scorching moments of panic. His nerves were refreshed. His body was rested, and with this revival his sanguine temperament recovered itself and he tried to forget the moments of panic that had shaken him.

He told himself that nothing alarming would happen. By tomorrow, Edna would be inured to the problems of Eva's visit; and at the end of the week the guest would be given permission to remain in the country. She would remove to another address, and that would mark the end of his association with her. If, in the meantime, officials suspected the truth, he could plead complete ignorance of her mission. There wasn't a shred of evidence that they could lay hands on and which might implicate him. Here, in London, only the Doctor, Eva and himself, had knowledge of his complicity in the affair. And—perhaps Edna. And that beggar along the street. And Bertha, perhaps.

But why anticipate so many difficulties? Why not let things rest? Eva would soon be gone. Only six or seven days, and then . . .

He achieved for an instant a clear notion of her future activities. A carefully trained and redoubtable spy. Sent here upon a mission of extreme importance. He hadn't been told what it was, but he could guess. There were so many secret projects on hand. Armaments; scientific work; the atomic research stations. And this woman, an enemy, an instrument of determined, calculating purposes, here!

He sat up quickly. But he was frightening himself with these morbid flights of imagination. He was exaggerating a few remote possibilities, overestimating the risks, and

giving fancies the form and hue of hard facts. But surely underestimating certain things, as well. Eva's identity, for instance. A spy. And himself—her accomplice.

Spy. It had a flavor of unreality, fiction, vagueness. His imagination had never truly examined her in relation to that word. But the unreality fell away from the word and disclosed Eva Droumek to him. An actual spy, admitted by his assistance, his complicity.

But—probably no more than a clever agitator sent to tidy up wavering groups. Nothing important. No threat to secrets concerning the country's defense and safety. Nothing to do with young Fawley's work. But in any case, he would make certain never to mention a word about Fawley or his room at Bertha's, or his visits here from time to time. Nor would Edna or Bertha.

He sank again into the cool water. Nothing would arise to confirm his feverish fancies. Even Edna—she would never be so foolish as to denounce him. Wasn't her own name and her own future bound to his? And Bertha? Would she be likely to inform against him and involve Edna in disgrace, scandal, ruin? The thing was held safely in this impasse. None of them could take a step. Not even Eva. All of them, rooted in deadlock. He grimaced. A problem, certainly, for all of them, individually. A moral problem, if you like!

Patience. That was the thing. But, of course, for Edna, not only patience but a moral problem as well. Whether to harbor a clever spy, or Communist agitator, here, and let her eventually wander off, at large; or inform the police. . . . His moral problem, as well as Edna's. So, for the sake of their marriage, their love . . . But had he not long ago destroyed love; and wasn't this treason of his the blow that might descend upon Edna's well-being, and upon his own?



Again, nothing but another flight of fancy. He got out of the bath and started to dry himself. He heard the telephone ringing in his study. Suddenly motionless, he felt presentiments of personal disaster rising in him, riding into his imagination, thudding into his heart.

He snatched up his gown and was at the door when Edna entered the study. He heard her. The pleasant voice, of her graceful life, so unsuspecting, so soon to be the note of poignant distress.

For an instant, his spirit lamented his corruption, while he stood listening in the bathroom doorway.

"Yes, speaking. Yes, it is."

And then, as he had anticipated, the decline to distress.

"Oh . . . But . . . Oh, that's . . ."

Then silence. He hastened across the passage and into the study and stood facing her, his hand outstretched to take the instrument from her, to spare her from calamity.

Her somber, pained glance rose to him. Still listening, she drew away from him, making a gesture to dismiss him.

And with a shocked, absorbed look heavy on her face, she went on speaking, slowly and painfully, "This is the first I have heard of it. This afternoon? Yes, I was here."

He lowered his head and spread his hand over his face. His reeling thoughts overwhelmed him. Her words pierced and confused his mind until, suddenly, he caught at them with delirious hope, realizing that the conversation did not relate to him, was perhaps something to do with an accident. He lifted his head and stood waiting with a great, greedy stare of interrogation stiff on his face, his body thrust forward with a hunger of hope and impatience.

"I'm very, very sorry to hear it," Edna said. "Tell Mary I'll come and see her tomorrow. And if there is anything I

can do, please don't hesitate to . . . Yes, please do. And tell Mary she is not to think of coming back this week."

He could not repress the surging smile of relief and reprieve that flooded his face. He saw the aghast look rush out at him from Edna's features and disappear when he checked himself. Then, caught like that in all the definition of his guilt and anxieties, he saw her replace the instrument.

She regarded him with cold disgust for an instant before speaking. "Mary's mother was killed in a street accident, this afternoon," she said. And after a pause, she added, "I told Mary not to come back this week."

"Killed," he mumbled. "How terrible! Very sad . . ."

She went past him without speaking, and he heard the door close behind her quietly but firmly, as though she were shutting him in here, alone, with his crime, far from her life.

He remained there for some minutes. It was not until he opened the door and crossed the passage to the bedroom that he remembered what she had said. Mary's mother killed in an accident. Mary not returning this week.

And thus, that small measure of safety. But he felt that he had gained it through the death of the meek little woman in drab clothes whom he had once seen in the kitchen with Mary.

He dressed quickly, putting on a very light suit of flannel. He no longer thought of making an effort to carry off a suitable air which would give Bertha an impression of innocence. He sauntered in, hoping to make the best of himself, but empty, tired, incapable of rising from the inert and hopeless sense of himself.

Bertha had risen to go. He made straight for the cabinet and poured himself a drink.

"Bertha! Can I offer you anything? And you, my dear?"

The door opened and Eva Droumek entered the room. She approached Edna.

"I slept for two hours, thank you."

To his astonishment, Edna smiled. "I hope you are feeling rested," she said.

"Bertha," Edna was saying, as he came forward, "this is Miss Droumek."

It was not until he was among them and noticed Eva's appearance that he realized why Edna had smiled and why Bertha was suddenly silent and embarrassed after the brief exchange of civilities.

"You are very kind," Eva said in reply to Bertha's greeting. Her eyes shone. Laughter seemed imminent on her lips. Her hands seemed to leap towards each other, and she glanced exuberantly at Edna, Bertha, and Charles.

He found it difficult to repress the guffaw of laughter which rose to his lips. She had put on a flimsy, wine-colored blouse and a gray skirt. Her muscular, short arms were bare from the elbows. She had gathered her dark hair in a ribbon which matched the blouse and which was tied in a large bow at the back of her head. And like a plump schoolgirl brimming with vivacity and yet conscious of the adults watching her, she stood flushed and restless before them, constrained by their silence, unconscious of her ridiculous appearance.

It was a parody of girlhood and innocence, enacted by a woman whose mature figure obtruded itself on the sight, and whose experienced, forceful character was only emphasized more sharply by the incongruous ribbon in her hair. And this, he thought, this is what I enjoined on her.

Drawing on a glove, Bertha rescued her. "I expect we

shall meet again, Miss Droumek. I want to hear about your country. Good-bye, for the present."

"Charles," she said, turning at once to him, "I won't ask you to drive me home. But you can see me into the elevator."

He followed her from the room and, in silence, to the little hall, and out to the corridor and the elevator shaft. He pressed the switch and heard the elevator coming up.

He couldn't look at her, or speak. He opened the gates and she went in. She put out a hand to hold open the gates. Her eyes reproached him, and she shook her head slowly.

"Charles!" she whispered. "What a problem you've given all of us!" And then her sigh, and her soft exclamation that was without reproach and full only of a pity which he knew he did not merit.

"Oh, my dear, my dear . . ."

He drew the gates across. He caught a glimpse of her upturned face with its puzzled look and its bit of pity floating to him on her glance as the lift sank out of sight. Then he returned to the living room.

"Give Miss Droumek something to drink, Charles," Edna said.

Demure, with her hands clasped in her lap, Eva was seated on the edge of a chair.

"Dinner is ready," Edna said. "If you'll come in, after you've had an aperitif."

She left them for a few seconds. Charles poured whisky into a glass and added soda water. When he handed the glass to her, his guest looked up at him, shook her head, gave him a disdainful smile, and like a schoolgirl behaving discreetly at her first adult party said, "I mustn't, thank you!"

He thrust it into her hands.

"Take it," he said, peremptorily, in an undertone. "You might need it."

She sipped it critically, paused to appraise it, and lifting the glass again to her lips drank the contents at a single draught. She handed the glass back to him.

"That was whisky, a spirit, not a tonic water. It will do you no good to drink it like that," he complained.

"We shall see," she said, mischievously.

Edna returned, and the three of them went to the dining room.

## I I

He had anticipated an ordeal of silence, with himself desperately attempting to encourage conversation or to steer it like an anxious pilot through dangerous currents and across sluggish expanses. Nothing like that happened.

He was surprised, at first, by Edna's brisk, amicable tone which was quick to outpace the guest's sudden liveliness. But no sooner had she served the soup than she relapsed into silence which irked him. He felt that in the hush which had fallen upon them and which she herself did not seem to find embarrassing, there was all the time a monotonous, persistent voice a little out of earshot reciting his own and Eva's perfidy and defeat. And looking occasionally at Edna and meeting her high, clear gaze as she sat erect at the head of the table, he was sure that she



sensed every word of that recital and approved it all and was amused by his discomfiture.

He endured it for as long as he could, then in revolt he ended it with a recklessness which he instantly deplored.

"You are very silent, Miss Droumek."

She had already finished her soup and had reached for a second roll which she was breaking in her strong fingers.

"I am hungry," she said, as though she were only then aware of him opposite her.

"We are waiting for you, Charles," Edna said.

Then Eva had looked quickly at Edna. He felt that something passed between them. He finished his soup quickly. Edna took the empty plates and rose to bring in the salmon.

"Perhaps I can help," Eva said.

She followed Edna from the room. Sitting alone at the table, Charles heard them in the kitchen. They were talking as though they had known each other for years. Already, and through an instinct which, as women, they shared, they had found a way from the dilemma and left him to bear the whole burden of the problem.

It was like that throughout the rest of the meal. They had an inexhaustible variety of topics of conversation which, in a curiously impersonal way which left both of them intact and yet engrossed, they pursued with genuine interest. First of all, food and its quantity, variety, price. He tried to enter this topic, but the two of them had so many questions to ask each other that they gave him only a grudging opportunity which he soon relinquished. Next, methods of cooking. Gas or electricity. Fuel supplies. And over the dessert, a sudden change of subject, and the beginning of a long conversation concerning dress

fashions, clothes for the various seasons and occasions; materials, prices, quantity and quality.

It was the world of universal womanhood. They were women first of all. The rest: the implacable and somber problem created by the conflicting ideologies of national aspiration was silent in them, held at a distance, pushed somehow upon him. He felt that he was a spectator at some secret rite pursued by women since the beginning of history.

He interjected his remarks, but they were swallowed and somehow abolished by the swift flow of words from the women. He played the host, but that, too, did not help him. In the end, after the coffee and the liqueurs, he felt humiliated. He was like an attendant engaged to wait upon them and to sit patiently nearby. At last, he escaped, without a word, to his study. He had a long report to prepare for his chief, and a great many notes to make regarding the progress of last week's discussions, as well as more notes for the agenda of a long committee meeting tomorrow.

But he was listless and unable to concentrate upon the work. His mind refused to contemplate it. He had no zest, no ideas. With a distaste which he had never yet felt for his job, he flinched from the prospect of the next day's engagements. And the furtive encounters with those of his colleagues who, like himself, were party members.

Everywhere, his problem met him. And like a background to his tedious thoughts there were the voices of the women. There had been a pause, a few minutes ago, during which Edna had given Eva some old numbers of various fashion magazines to look through. He had left his study and sauntered into the living room and seen her poring over them.

Suddenly, he recollected that in one of them he had seen—in an article upon eminent young men—a paragraph which mentioned Fawley. There was a photograph of him. “Doctor Christopher Fawley, acknowledged to be Britain’s foremost research chemist and, at thirty-five, entrusted with the direction of a scientific project as important in its field as the development of the atom bomb, lives up to his own reputation as a man whose work is the only all absorbing and important thing in his life.” And, following that, something about his personality. “. . . so inimical to that of the scientist of drama and fiction . . .”

He went impetuously to the dining room where Edna was clearing the table.

“Did you give her those fashion magazines?” he whispered.

She nodded, without pausing at her work.

“In one of them, there is a photograph of Chris, and some information about him. I can’t remember what month it was. I wish you would take them from her.”

She turned and looked at him in astonishment. She couldn’t prevent herself from showing her amusement at his extreme caution. She struggled to hold back her laughter.

“Really, as if . . .”

He turned aside and went back to Eva. He wasn’t to know that before giving Eva the magazines, Edna had found an opportunity to remove the entire page from that number, without leaving a trace of its withdrawal.

He sat down and lit a cigarette. Almost immediately, Eva got up and hurried out to assist Edna. He heard them again. First, Eva: “But such things are like the motor cars. Not for sale in this country. Only for export to the rich Americans. They are not in the shops.”

It was the flat-footed, stubborn kind of remark from a

mind choked with propaganda. Even he could recognize that.

"On the contrary, all the things advertised can be purchased, except motor cars," Edna said.

The answer to that came without hesitation.

"But this cannot be so. These advertisements are not the truth. These are printed for the sake of propaganda . . . so the Communists have told us. . . ."

Then, Edna's clear laughter. "There's no doubt that they did."

". . . to persuade you to believe that such goods were still for sale in this country. But there are no such things permitted to be sold to you. All must go to America."

"Tomorrow, you shall see," Edna said. "We'll go along Regent Street and Oxford Street and look in the shops."

"Ah, yes. In the windows, but not for sale—except to the rich classes."

"On sale to anyone who wishes to buy them."

"But not for the people. They must take only the Utility Garments. Yes, this is the case."

"You will see for yourself," Edna said, emphatically. "I'll take you inside the shops, to the counters. You can ask the clerks."

He got up, yawning. He was exhausted and unable to think reasonably. In the kitchen, when he went in to say good night to them, they were talking about something else. Soap powders, something like that.

"Yes, of course it does," Edna was saying. "It washes silk as well."

Eva had poured into the palm of her hand some of the flakes and was examining them expertly. He turned away and went out.

"Seven days," he thought.

He wondered what processes, what conflicts, would

arise in that time. He wondered in what way Edna would pursue the advantage which she held so firmly. Undressing quickly, he ceased to think of it. In bed, he lay on his side, facing Edna's bed, and left the lamp alight on the table. Presently, he closed his eyes, and almost immediately sleep came like a stealthy tide from his tired body and his exhausted mind.

Later—he did not know at what time of the night—he was vaguely aware of a sudden extinction of light, as of something that had previously shed around his life a constant and comforting radiance abruptly ceasing, leaving him in darkness which he feared but which, in the dream into which he had gone, he could neither understand nor traverse.

## I 2

Coming into the room half an hour later, Edna saw that he was fast asleep. Without the conscious mask of his geniality, his features bore an expression of enormous grievance. His heavy breathing was like a sigh, constantly repeated. She turned away, troubled by her pity for him, unwilling to pry into that unguarded, vulnerable page whereon so much that was base and worthless lay in pitiable submission to her gaze. She reproached herself: for years, she had been so concerned to maintain the façade of marriage; and as long as that had the appearance of harmony and solidity she had disregarded the rest, ex-



cept to issue a kind of warning to him that the consequences of his conduct in all its furtive directions must not imperil her. She had never summoned the courage to save him from himself by influencing the energetic chaos of his character and giving it better principles, the discipline of her own example, or a hope of scope in something which she would share actively with him. She had hugged to herself her timid vision, her little space, and it had never been broad enough for him. He had hurried on, far ahead of her into this. . . .

She closed her mind to the word, and realized that in spite of all her efforts to compose amidst the fluidity and instability of the contemporary scene a reasonable, progressive mode of life for herself that might, at last, satisfy Charles, the end which had always lurked in his character had become a reality and was now on the threshold of her private haven.

Undressing and getting into bed, she left the lamp alight. It was futile to tell herself that she held an advantage over Charles and Eva Droumek. The advantage was a figment of imagination unless she was prepared to use it. And she had neither the knowledge, the skill, nor the aptitude for using an advantage. There was nothing combative in her nature. She had the prejudices common to most people. And she was often intolerant of the opinions of other people. But it was only in herself that she refused to compromise. In conversation, she always appeared to yield, to elude the necessity for defending her point of view. She knew it. She was aware of the fact that Charles, Bertha, Fawley and others of her friends thought her passive and complacent.

What she always sought was the avoidance of arguments, the escape from the conflicts of discussions. She disliked wringing a situation for the last word, the drop

of advantage or triumph. She feared any crisis in personal relationships. It was so much better to let Time influence opinion, smooth away prejudices, prove one to have been right. That way, one was always intact and tranquil. It mattered so little that one was termed weak. That was the price one paid for peace.

But in spite of her efforts, she had not escaped. Here was a private crisis that had sneaked into her life and become a monstrous issue. Charles—involved in this wretched business which, with its condemnation of Communism, only seemed to her to carry the guile of Communism within it. And his odious attempts to deceive her at first, and then to pretend that he now suspected Eva Droumek of being—more than bogus. His readiness to deny his association with her and betray her secret. His suggestion that she was a spy, or a Communist agitator. The word—so fantastic—a spy! And Charles . . . But to harbor this woman in this flat was to invite disaster. But to denounce her would be to denounce Charles as well. And even to begin to speak about her, or question her credentials, with anyone in authority would be to court the same disaster. Scandal, disgrace, imprisonment for Charles. This monstrous dilemma! This gale of suspicion that had been imminent for months, and that was increased by Charles' wretched twists, and Droumek's startling and murky relationship to him in that moment when he had introduced her, and the woman's momentary pallor, and the almost desperate insistence in her behavior that she was a genuine refugee. And the belief, supported by so much that was nervous, guilty, and distraught in Charles since his return, this afternoon, that he and Droumek were accomplices.

This deadly conflict of wills! Droumek's crafty, implacable nature—that of the trained spy, perhaps, or the

cunning agitator—against her own nature with its distaste for conflict. But already, in the inflexible character of the woman, and her continuation of the pretense of being a refugee, there was the promise of a duel to be fought by the two of them.

At the thought of it, she quailed and then suddenly achieved the full stature of her spirit in all its true strength. Never to compromise in her attitude to Droumek. To accept the challenge. . . .

But surely there was a middle course wherein this conflict might dissolve. Yet even Bertha, with her vigorous common sense, had not found it.

“Wait,” she had said. “Say nothing. Do nothing. You haven’t actual proof. All the same, you hold the advantage. We’ll talk about the matter tomorrow.”

From the adjoining room, there sounded a dry, wakeful cough that told her of the woman in there lying awake and tormented by this same problem.

And remembering the strange, tacit agreement which operated between them throughout the evening, Edna imagined that it was from that point in themselves, and in terms of the ordinary features of daily life, that a course lay which would resolve the problem for all of them. A kind of enticement to this woman to enter a new environment and assume the garments of truth instead of those of lies and deceits, and to proceed into genuine relationships founded on better things than guile. Until all vestiges of Droumek, the impostor, were lost.

She turned and extinguished the lamp and was asleep before the logical development of that idea might have shown her that by meticulously identifying herself with every possible shade of individual life in the dense undergrowth of personal relationships, Eva Droumek would successfully achieve the disguise which she sought. It was,

in fact, something which she had been prepared to attempt. She had been trained to that end. To adapt herself, in so many degrees, to what was about her. To make friends. But in the core, the heart, to remain loyal and pursue her mission.

## 13

Eva Droumek was not a Czech, nor was her name Droumek. She was born in the northern district of the province of Astrakhan where her father had been a prosperous farmer. From both of her parents she had inherited the kulak's character. The revolution took her when she was five years old. She had the acquisitive spirit of the kulak, and by some odd twist in the methods of the first earnest young schoolteachers who taught her, she was encouraged to regard the subjects of the curriculum as things of wealth, to be gained and utilized. At school, when she was thirteen, she showed an aptitude for languages and for elementary physics and chemistry. When the time came for her to proceed to a higher education, she was told that languages would be subsidiary to science in that grade.

Later, as a brilliant pupil, she was sent to one of the state universities and enrolled in the faculty of science. She was sixteen, and already a rapidly maturing woman and a hard, developing personality. Her career as a student was outstanding. It was in her nature to excel, never

to take second place when she felt that she could take the first. In everything, she had an innate desire to predominate. By the time she had graduated she was already famous as a chemist, as a member of the party serving on its local Executive, as a linguist, and as a champion swimmer and climber. Her future was decided by the state.

She was assigned to Travek as his senior assistant in his researches into the problem of hysteresis. When the Nazis invaded her country she begged to be allowed to join the Soviet Air Force as a fighter pilot. Instead of granting her request, the state sent her to Ostrowski who, at that time, was beginning the second stage of his work relating to enzymes. In this appointment, she was to work on equal terms with Ostrowski, who was an elderly man. She amended the first stage of his theory in order to develop her own researches which had soon gone beyond his. Finally, she lost patience with his slow, contemplative attitude to problems, and his lackadaisical habits which retarded her striding ideas. He was removed. She continued her researches alone, taking her theories to a successful conclusion. Her theses were never published and never brought into discussion, although she was liberally rewarded for them. Towards the end of the war, she was sent to Kulin to assist him in the establishment of his Institute in Bucharest.

He was ten years her senior. He was not a member of the party, and in spite of his lofty reputation and his achievements, he had not been honored by the state. He secretly abhorred Communism; and as his reputation as a scientist increased, so did the necessity for some act or statement of loyalty to Communism from him become imperative.

His intellectual probity would not permit him to pretend a loyalty which he did not possess. Consequently, he



preferred "retirement" to the dreadful duality which the state had created in so many intelligent people. The method by which he would be retired was obvious to him. As she had done to Ostrowski, his new assistant would supplant him. He had heard of her, and he had no doubt that she had been sent to render obsolete his theories and discoveries.

From the outset, he realized that she admired him for his work. Whether she understood that she was to supplant him, he did not know. Her admiration for him was amusing to him. He awed her. She was like a slave before him, so willing to obey, so excited by this proximity to him, so ready to listen to him like a disciple. He found in her a brilliant chemist. That was all. Unknown to her, the state had too firm a hold upon her mind for her to become an authentic scientist. Half of that mind of hers was maimed, clouded with a mass of rubbish upon which reason could not operate. The wholeness, the submission to truth, the indivisibility which was the prerequisite demanded from the truly great scientist would never be hers. Perhaps, later on, she would discover it for herself. Then she would writhe in distress because her mutilated mind could not attain indivisibility and soundness. He pitied her.

He was always ahead of her, and it intrigued him to observe how her crippled mind rose to reach towards the gleam of truth and reason and then stumbled painfully before it attained the fact. But he was there to assist her. He even made it possible for her to begin an entirely new approach to certain theories relating to enantiotropic substances. He never doubted her considerable, brilliant abilities, and he took care that they should have all the scope they deserved. But in the end he was still at work. And she? If it had not been so tragic, he would have

laughed. She was undoubtedly in love with him, and his general considerateness had been mistaken by her for the cautious, unspoken passion of love.

One night, in the autumn of 1949, she disappeared from her small flat, from the local party, from the Institute, from the lives of her friends and comrades. Nobody, quite literally nobody, questioned this disappearance.

She had been instructed by the state to travel to an address near Moscow. She was not to communicate with anyone. As an ardent party member, she obeyed. She assumed that her association with Kulin, which she had found so inspiring and which had been so closely observed by her superiors, must have aroused displeasure. She had transgressed, of course. She had known that Kulin was not in the party and had never given any indication of his devotion to Marxism. But he was a great scientist, and it was for this that she had admired him, although she had been so circumspect, so certain that no word of their love for each other had ever risen to their lips. But still, a transgression and, therefore, wrong. Was it?

The hostel to which she was ordered to proceed was a grim building. There were seventy-four other inmates. Like herself, none of them knew why she was there. Not until twelve hours had elapsed. There was a staff of twenty men and twenty women. Under the unremitting, revoltingly obsequious and subservient attention of these people, all the inmates were perturbed. Indeed, the behavior of the staff during those twelve hours had an extraordinary effect upon Eva Droumek. The ingratiating, odious smiles of those men and women, their knowledge of her fate here, and their servile air, seemed to her to promise a terrible refinement of cruelty in a punishment of particular severity and subtlety which would here be administered. She turned upon herself a frantic and criti-

cal eye, searching for disloyalty, guilt, and finding it only in that secret admiration for Kulin. So—the punishment.

It made no difference to her when she learned that she and the other inmates had been selected for special training and special missions. Deeply within herself, there was now that acknowledgment of guilt, and the expectation of punishment. But not because of her passion of Kulin which, after all, was not a transgression. For something which, seeking, she had discovered far off in the most remote depths of her being. She was morbidly but vaguely aware of it: her share in some monstrous crime which she and all her comrades had perpetrated. But where, when, how? She could not remember. And yet it was there: the guilt. Like something which she had committed, forgotten, and which was now returned to her memory in the form of this acknowledgment of her guilt. Strange—and indelible.

She forgot it. Her life was upon new paths. She lamented the transformation because it terminated her career as a scientist and sent her out as an espionage agent. Humiliating appellation! A spy. But then—the punishment? Or was that yet to come?

She was loyal and obedient. And when she was given her assignment, she consoled herself with the fact that it could be regarded as a scientific one.

She gave herself completely to it. She was to make her way to England. Well, she could devise ways and means. She was to make contact with seven trained subordinates who were already there awaiting her. She learned their names. She studied their histories. Scum, the wretched instruments to be found anywhere in Europe today, cheaply, and capable of being sharpened as a means to an end. And the end: her discovery of the scientific project, and its methods and purpose, which Fawley was con-

ducting. She had been trained. And she, too, was a scientist. And when she returned to Russia . . .

The whole fiber of her being pulsed with determination, with the fervor of belief in the ideology of the state whose servant she was, with the rage of frustration against Edna. Lying awake in her bed in Edna's home, she examined the defeat and failure which confronted her. She was staring only at the chilly, ingenuous expression on Edna's face. A face which symbolized defeat for her, which she could not abolish, which held her at an infuriating, humiliating disadvantage. And which would never relent, never give her the chance to overcome her. To suffer this constriction, this failure, and to see in it the already approaching shape of ultimate failure!

She swallowed two of the tablets with some water, and fell into a deep sleep from which she awoke to find Edna beside the bed. Edna, with breakfast on a tray. Edna smiling triumphantly.

## I 4

Pulmer, the newspaper reporter, was the tenant of a flat above a tobacconist's shop. Advertised as self-contained, compact, moderate rental, it consisted of one room which was his bed-sitting room, and a small combined bathroom and lavatory. The kitchen—nothing more than a gas ring and a sink—was in a corner of the landing outside his room. The weekly rental was thirty-five shillings,

plus electricity and gas charges. Pulmer thought the flat was a good bargain.

The shop below was one of a dozen in a row. All the shops had one storey above them, and these had been converted into flats similar to Pulmer's or else into store-rooms. On one side, his neighbors were two young women sharing a flat; on the other side, there were a young couple and their infant son.

Whenever they were at home, the two young women switched on their radio. On Pulmer's other side, the young wife turned on her radio at about seven in the morning and usually left it playing until eleven at night.

"It's company like," she explained to Pulmer, one morning, when she came in to borrow a shilling for the gas meter. "But I'll have to turn it down. I never knew it sounded so loud."

"There's one on this side, too," Pulmer said, jerking his head towards the flat on the opposite side.

"Must be chronic for you! And I expect you hear the baby sometimes."

"It's company," he said, grinning at her.

He did not tell her that through the flimsy walls or, in summer, the open windows, he heard almost every word which she and her husband uttered. Nor did he say anything about the girls next door. They worked in a factory where the clamor of the machinery drowned the sound of normal speech. The habit of speaking loudly had become permanent in them. Whether he wanted to or not, Pulmer overheard everything they said; but because their vocabulary was very slender, their opinions limited, their ideas similar to those of thousands of other persons, their prejudices persistent and monotonous, it seemed to him that after a week or two they were repeating themselves. Then the sound of their voices was like the ticking of a clock,



the rattle of passing traffic in the street below, the drone of dance music from the radios, and all the other sounds that seemed to Pulmer to compose the animated little pool of sound in which he and his neighbors existed.

It was not unpleasant. The traffic went past in the street. Customers came and went in and out of the shops. The footsteps, the chatter and laughter of people passing on the pavements, rose into the light and the mild wind. On the other side of the road, there were small trees along the pavements; and beyond the railings there was a public park with a playground for children and some public tennis courts. Dressed in white clothes, the players walloped the balls at one another, then walked away to gather other balls, called the scores, carefully changed positions according to the rules, struck energetic and skilful attitudes, constantly missed the shots, and never seemed to settle down to play. But their voices rose cheerfully, and Pulmer heard them.

“Love . . . love all . . . yours . . . love . . .”

It was all new to him, this fragment of life in a busy, expanding little town. He had come from quietude, culture, wealth that was declining. Pulmer strayed rather timidly into a new world. When he left the army, he walked more boldly into it. He came to this little scene.

But when, through his work, and through some contact with his neighbors, he became better acquainted with this segment of a large and powerful society, he became alarmed. These were adults. They had children. They made their choice at local and government elections. But what authority, what factor, spirit, principle, truly inspired these people, guided them, safeguarded them, encouraged them to think reasonably, and showed them how to savor fully the immeasurable possibilities inherent in themselves?

It alarmed him to discover that there was no authority at all except that of material necessity. Beyond the basic fact of having to earn wages and salaries in order to buy food, clothes, and pay rent and other personal expenses, authority in any shape or form did not touch their lives. They obeyed the civil law, and adapted themselves in various ways to a moral law. They saw from a kind of remote distance the evidence of government. They paid taxes, and were vaguely aware that the total was applied to the upkeep of the armed services, some public services, local services. They knew all their rights, but few of their responsibilities until these loomed grimly before them. And yet, from his study of history, he knew that he and they were living in an age of astounding and veritable progress in which the individual in the democracies enjoyed more personal liberty and a better standard of living than in any previous period of human existence. The long, arduous, and terrible struggle of men and women of previous centuries to attain this goal was at last successful. But the heirs of this victory were hardly conscious of it. They enjoyed life; but they lived in terms of the narrow, day to day aspects of their own characters and temperaments. They had no consciousness of themselves as the heirs of liberties which had been denied their ancestors. Above their heads, governments squabbled, wrestled with problems, planned and regulated affairs. Here, society lived on a personal note, and when it seemed to draw together it was always upon some fatuous, trite enthusiasm, a transient fashion, a new face, a new dance number, a new prejudice. Anything that required an effort of thought bored it and could not attract its attention.

This was what Pulmer found in the environment in which he lived. It alarmed him. He supposed that the process of education was to blame for the mediocrity of

mind which he imagined he sensed in his neighbors. Education had lost its true purpose. Instead of being used as a means whereby the habit of reasonable thinking was encouraged, it had been fashioned into a process whereby knowledge could be amassed for purely competitive ends. It had become perverted and debased. Everybody spoke, but few thought first. The process of thought began more from an impulse of emotion than from reasonable judgment based upon knowledge. Storms of emotion deluged the world. Propaganda fell like rain, like sunlight, like fearsome lightning or splendid rainbows. The appeal was always to the emotions.

Pulmer felt that at any moment another Hitler, another Mussolini could arise, this time with all the evil dexterity acquired from experience, and scoop this complacent society back into the folds of slavery merely by uttering a few specious sentences and making a few promises. It was as gullible as that. It was as ripe for such a downfall as any ancient monarch who lived to claim his rights while ignoring his responsibilities. Pulmer's neighbors were, he believed, representative of that society.

Day after day, week after week, the two young women said the same things, expressed the same current ideas, the same fallacies, prejudices, enthusiasms, and worthless hopes, and kept the radio blaring without listening to it. The only change was when they sang a new song and dance number. And across the road, on the tennis courts, the players walked briskly about, gathering the balls, taking the proper positions, expending much energy without achieving more than a couple of correct shots. "Love . . . love all . . . your service!" And in the flat on the opposite side, the young couple ignored everything else except their duty to their infant son, feeding him, bathing him, soothing him, and studying the little books on sale

in the shop below. *You and Your Baby*, by a Trained Nurse. *Your Child's Future*, by a Psychologist. And at any moment, the thing could happen.

Sitting in his room in his flat and eating an evening meal, Pulmer heard it all. It seemed to have no other purpose than to await the final, grand act of deception.

Next door, the baby cried. The father said, "Better take him round to the clinic, tomorrow, and see if there's anything wrong with him. Keeps on cryin'."

The mother said, "You needn't worry. He's all right. He's just jealous, because I'm talkin' to you and not to 'im. It says in the book, 'The instinct of a child is quick to notice any change in your routine.' See? This psychologist says . . ."

And on the opposite side, the two young women shouted at each other.

"She arrived safe, it says. And there's a picture of 'er!"

"Show! Oh, there she is! Lovely, isn't she?"

When he heard that, Pulmer's conscience nagged at him. But although he discerned the problem, he had no solution to offer. He could quite easily go to the police and ask to speak to the Inspector, and tell him the theme of his suspicions. But he flinched from going. It would be very much like interfering in something which was not his business.

And that, he thought, was precisely the attitude of his neighbors to numerous matters about which they knew very little and cared less. Not their business.

It was the easy way out.

# 15

Ten minutes later, he left his flat and telephoned a friend who had been at Cambridge with him and who was now at the Foreign Office. He had not seen Senlink for a year or answered the letter which he had had from him seven months ago. Dialing his number on a call-box telephone, he wondered if he was still living in the vicinity of Lad-broke Grove, and if their friendship had survived his neglect of it.

"What a delightful surprise!" Senlink exclaimed, when Pulmer spoke to him.

Pulmer hardly recognized in the stilted tone the voice of his friend.

"How are you, Tommy?" he said.

At university, Senlink had read Logic and Philosophy and had been renowned for his speech rhythm. He resumed it now, with an exuberance which revealed that he was genuinely pleased to hear Pulmer.

"I wrote to you!" he exclaimed. "I telephoned to your old abode. I asked Matthew, Mark, Luke; John, Peter, James; Helena, Ruth, Jill. You had gone, they said, from the favored nook, the peccable paths, the abortive ways. But if he has gone, I said, from the favored nook, the peccable paths, the abortive ways, this does not imply that he is not elsewhere . . ."

"I am on my way to you, Tommy."

"On your way, on your way, on your way!"

"How do I get to your gramophone record groove?" Pulmer asked.



Senlink laughed. "Turn left at Ladbroke groove!"

Pulmer arrived at his friend's flat an hour later. It was on the second floor of an old house. Its rooms were very large; and although Senlink had furnished them tastefully, they were still cavernous and half empty. He was a tall, thin person of twenty-six.

"I've done my best with them," he explained. "But they were built for the Victorians, who wore so many clothes. All those crinolines and frock coats! Two Victorians could fill a room of this size. But come over to the window and sit down. What will you drink?"

"Oh, some beer, thanks, Tommy," Pulmer said, sinking into an easy chair at the window which overlooked a black little garden.

"I fear I have only gin and sherry, so we'll pop around to the decent local, later on," Senlink said. "You are looking preposterously fit, old man."

"How is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?" Pulmer said. "I haven't seen you since you won entry. What is the job like?"

Senlink was wearing a silk shirt and flannel trousers. He stepped over several books, and removed notebooks and pen from his chair into which he lowered himself.

"Are you writing some poetry?" Pulmer said, glancing at the notebooks.

Senlink seemed amused. "Poetry? I haven't achieved half a line since I became a civil servant!" he declared. Then he grimaced. "They keep us at it, in the F.O. No time for anything but . . . I'm learning Russian and Spanish, and grinding up my French, and doing some Economic History."

"You are being exploited, Tommy," Pulmer said.

Tommy grinned. He had a round, amiable face and wise little eyes. Stretching his arms and folding his hands

behind his head, he looked tired, worried, and slightly disillusioned.

"It would be all right if there were something in me which could be exploited," he said, whimsically. "In the F.O. they expect one to know such a hell of a lot. I do wish I had read more. Really, I feel that I know nothing, nothing, nothing."

Pulmer sighed and looked away. "Two or three years ago, you and I knew everything, Tommy."

"If we didn't quite believe that," Tommy said, "it was the attitude we adopted."

"Never mind. You have a very nice attitude now," Pulmer said. "Was the process of transformation very savage?"

"Brutal. I always thought that a first in Logic and Philosophy was something. But . . . do you know, Pulmer . . . typists who speak four languages fluently and who have read the literature of those countries. And secretaries whose knowledge of the world, the world, the wide world, is—but there. For the first six months, I did nothing but sort out telegrams and file them away after they were decoded. Do you know, old man, I had to keep consulting an atlas to find where the places were from which they came. And the filing cabinets—and the system of filing! But later on, I was allowed to make notes about the telegrams. And all the time I felt I was an appalling ignoramus. I was! One Sunday afternoon, one of my mother's old friends came to tea, and mother said, 'Thomas is in the Diplomatic Service.' I blushed for the first time in my life. You went into journalism, didn't you?"

Pulmer nodded.

"Was it the same there?" Senlink asked. "Did you suppose that a rational mind, a flexible intellect, a poised vision, plus your five senses, were sufficient to equip you?"

"At first."

"So did I. I soon found that my lack of a sixth sense made me a conspicuous ignoramus."

"Must you have six senses there?" Pulmer said.

"The sixth tense is common sense."

They laughed. Senlink continued, "Twenty firsts are insignificant compared to it. My logic and philosophy . . . the juggler's gift, the acrobat's dexterity. But common sense, why it is the genius which has enabled the human spirit to survive centuries of successive tyrants, cranks, and stupid leaders who deluged it with wars, cruelties, starvation, disease and false ideals!"

"I believe you are right, Tommy," Pulmer said.

"I am only reciting the obvious, old man. Look at the world. Underneath the results of Cæsar's victories, any ancient king's misrule, Napoleon's ambitions, and all revolutions and crises, what have you? The common sense of millions of unknown people who preserved the world by retaining a common-sense attitude to human existence. By farming the land, keeping herds, weaving cloth, building ships and writing poems and stories and painting pictures and making music. That is what makes existence possible. That is survival, throughout millions of years. That is genius. Logic and philosophy talk, but common sense acts and preserves and develops."

"Do you think so?" Pulmer said.

"Of course!"

"That this one, universal attribute can achieve so much?"

"It can, and it does. It always has!"

Pulmer thought for a while.

"And what happens if common sense declines, loses its potency? Presumably, being a part of human nature, it is susceptible of a process of mutation?" Pulmer said.

"If it declined, or deteriorated—but that's too dreadful to contemplate. It is the factor which sustains mankind on this world. If it were to degenerate . . ."

"As it certainly has done, during the past half-century," Pulmer interjected, quietly.

"What?"

"I said it has sharply declined, at times, in this century."

"Oh, it becomes obscured now and then by external forces. History examples that. Revolutions, for instance."

"Never as profoundly before as it has done lately," Pulmer said. "Do you appreciate what happened to the Italians under Fascism, and to the Germans under the Nazis, and what is happening to the Russians and the Soviet satellite states under Communism?"

"Yes, I've looked into all that, lately. A tremendous assault on common sense, if you like. But . . ."

"Under which common sense, as you call it, broke down. Tommy, look at events objectively. I was sent to Germany during my national service. I hadn't deeply studied the facts before. The ascent of Mussolini which inspired the rise of Hitler. I amused myself while I was in Germany by getting down to it. I met chaps who let me study bits of the state archives of Hitler's Reich. Tommy, this assault on the basic common sense of a nation—this was a terrible phenomenon. Distortion of fundamental truths; unspeakable atrocities; insane racial theories resulting in appallingly planned mass-murders of millions of Jews merely because they were Jews. And all this was accepted, condoned, and—most dreadful of all—carried out by ordinary men and women in this century. Not savages, not ignorant and hapless mercenaries who could not reason the moral evil of what they were doing. But sane people who sat down to table among their families

and sometimes traveled in busses and went to cinemas and gave each other New Year presents. Tommy, these people murdered in cold blood no less than twelve million other people, under Hitler's extermination edicts."

Tommy got up. "Horrible to think about! Let's go out and . . . shall we, have a drink?" he said, nervously.

"They were people whose common sense had been most successfully assaulted," Pulmer went on. "And we mustn't leave out of the subject Mussolini's Fascism, which effected another, quite distinct, collapse of common sense. And last of all there is Communism which, for sheer ruthlessness in the name of the ordinary man whose common sense you and I accept as being a divine essence, has gone far beyond anything which Hitler and Mussolini committed, and has gained converts everywhere and in all classes and professions, even among Christian ministers of religion."

"Oh, I agree with you, old man," Senlink said. "But of course we have—the world did put down the Rome-Berlin Axis. You could say that common sense did prevail. . . ."

"And that Communism alone remains, and is the immense cloud looming over the entire globe and making a devilish and highly efficient attack upon common sense. And steadily wearing it down all the time by every sort of weapon, including the one presented to it by the natural enthusiasms of ordinary people."

Senlink walked restlessly about the room.

"Yes, Communism—pretty deadly and ferocious. But we have taken its measure, haven't we?"

Pulmer laughed. "Tommy, give yourself a gin and lime, and pour one for me, too, please. Then come and sit down again."

Senlink brought the glasses over and resumed his place.

"Well, go on, old man. What have you to tell me? I



guessed you had something on your mind. What is it? A scoop?"

"I suppose it is," Pulmer said. "But I can't treat it as one, and I don't intend to. I thought I'd come to you for help."

"Me? Oh, I'm a mere junior!" Senlink said. "I carry no—authority or anything like that."

Pulmer laughed. "You are a diplomat already."

"No, honestly, old man, I mean it. I am less than the dust."

He held his glass in both hands just below his nose, and looked pleadingly at Pulmer with his little eyes full of nervousness.

"You have heard and read about Eva Droumek, the woman who escaped from Prague, I suppose?" Pulmer said.

Senlink nodded. "Quite a furor!" he said.

"Have you thought about that, Tommy? Objectively?"

"She is quite a person, isn't she?" Senlink said.

"Very!" Pulmer said, sipping his drink. "Remarkable courage. Almost superhuman self-confidence. And a particular appeal which she seems to wield with great skill and before a huge audience. A strange skill, considering that she is only an obscure teacher of languages. The talent of a brilliant psychologist who knows exactly what response he can expect from certain stimuli administered to a subject."

Then there was silence for perhaps a minute. They sipped their drinks and looked at each other.

"How did you—who told you about her?" Senlink said.

For the next ten minutes, Pulmer related the same idea which he had put to his editor, Herdson, earlier in the day. Unlike Herdson, Senlink listened without interrupting and, later, without attempting to disparage Pulmer's

idea. He accepted it. Then again there was a long silence.

At last, Senlink said, "I'm afraid I can't do anything to help you. In the first place it is Home Affairs' pigeon, not the F.O.'s. And another thing, you know that the official mind doesn't like to be informed about something which it appears to have overlooked. Also, if it is cognizant of such a matter, it doesn't care to be interrupted."

"If the official mind were cognizant of Eva Droumek's real identity, she would never have been allowed to enter this country," Pulmer said.

"I don't know," Senlink said. "I wouldn't care to stick my neck out, in case she is being taken particular care of by a certain department."

"How could she be? If she were, she would have been sent back!"

"You never know, old man. Strange things happen."

"Don't be silly, Tommy! This is a serious matter. People make mistakes. Things happen which could be prevented if other people spoke up to the proper authorities. That's why I came to you."

"My dear chap, have some sense!" Tommy said, laughing. "I'm so far down the ranks that it would take weeks for me to convince somebody about this woman's identity. Besides, I don't know to whom I could mention it. And rather than risk creating trouble all around for myself, I'd much sooner hold my tongue. You've convinced me, I assure you. But I'm not so sure that I could convince anyone else. I know what my own chief would say. 'Kindly supply me with relevant proof, evidence, facts, Mr. Senlink.'"

"Then we had better leave it, I suppose," Pulmer said. "I can't do more than I have done. I have told you all I know. It seems a pity that nothing can be done. One

has only to remember that within the past few years three scientists from Britain . . .”

“I know, I know,” Senlink said.

“Well, then, help me to do something, Tommy, and don’t sit there like a nineteenth-century diplomat fearful of breaking conventions. Move with the times, and get a jump ahead of Communist tactics.”

“But I have explained, old man: it isn’t the F.O.’s pigeon!”

“See your chief. Tell him. He’ll soon pass it on to the proper people.”

“Pulmer, listen! If I did that, and if this matter were already being tackled, I should be—why, I’d be a laughing-stock for the rest of my life in the ministry.”

“You’ll be worse if something serious happens which, by a word or two to the right quarter, you could have prevented. Your conscience . . .”

“I know, I know.”

“Let me speak to your chief,” Pulmer said.

“I couldn’t do that.”

“Just what can you do, Tommy? Apart from filing the telegrams after you’ve made a précis of them.”

“Oh, shut up and let me think!”

And that was all that Senlink was willing to do.

“I’ll think about it,” he promised Pulmer almost two hours later. “And if I find a means of . . .”

“You’ll acquaint me of the fact in due course?” Pulmer said, grinning. He had a morning off on the following day and was in no hurry to return home. But already he sensed the cautious diplomat in Senlink, and he knew that in spite of all his protestations he would act promptly.

That was on Monday night. Senlink disclosed the matter to his chief as soon as possible on the following morn-

ing. He had exacted a promise from Pulmer that the latter would not divulge to anyone that he had mentioned the matter to him and discussed it with him. And he was pleased when, in answer to his chief's question, he was able to reply that he had taken that precaution.

But after he had come from his office, he felt perturbed and slightly foolish. No proof, no evidence. Only a suspicion, a notion! It was such slender ground to stand upon. And his chief had asked no more than that question, after which he had added, "The matter will be referred to the appropriate quarter, thank you."

Senlink wondered if anything would be done, and how long he would have to wait for further news.

## 16

After her visit to Charles and Edna, Bertha returned to her home in Maida Vale. She owned the house but occupied only the large ground-floor flat in which she had given Chris Fawley a room. The upper floors were converted into flats which she had let to two small families. Some years ago, she had met Fawley at Edna's flat, and again at a concert from which he had walked home with her. After that, he had called on her whenever he was in town. He spent an hour or two with her after long committee meetings and just before his train was due to

leave. Both of them were equable and strong-willed; and they shared fairly similar interests, and had an almost identical attitude to the restless spirit of the contemporary scene.

At first, she had imagined that his private life was haphazard. He was single. He had no home, except two rooms in one of the colleges at Cambridge, which had been offered to him by the authorities. But because his work took him up and down the country, he was not often in his rooms. He had a great many acquaintances but few friends, and his leisure was so scanty that he did not appear to have time to meet more people. Once, having been detained at what he always called a "committee meeting," he had missed the midnight express to the north. Bertha had offered him the use of her commodious spare bedroom, and he had accepted gladly. After that, she had given the room to him, together with a key to her flat; and there he left books, clothes, suitcases and gear between his visits.

She was careful to make few allusions to his work and never to question him about it. She had a vague idea that he was in charge of an extensive research project which was being conducted in several widely scattered laboratories to which he traveled from time to time. Crammed into a drawer of her writing desk she had some newspaper clippings about him. ". . . too early to predict results, and perhaps several years must elapse before they can be applied . . . this brilliant team led by one of Britain's foremost chemists . . . no mere handful of eccentric, untidy experts with weird habits, but young men of rational vision and character ably pursuing problems of research which, when resolved, will open a new era of human progress."



There were other paragraphs similar in substance to that one. She had shown them to Chris, and he had seemed amused, particularly at one which attempted to guess the subject of his work.

“ . . . will, according to our scientific correspondent, revolutionize human existence.”

“Like the pneumatic tire, the telephone, the card-index system, the potato, the shirt with collar attached, the internal combustion engine, Caxton’s printing press, the zip fastener, Littlewood’s Pools, and the cinema,” he said.

“What does all that mean?”

“That human existence is revolutionized by necessity, not by chance. Science is not a force, a fact, ahead of the race and confronting it with new discoveries bulging with moral problems. That idea is fanciful sensationalism, a sort of Wellsian fallacy.”

“I’ll have to think about that, Chris,” she had said.

Entering the house after her visit to Charles and Edna, she gathered her letters and the evening newspaper from the hall table. Because the drawing-room door was open, she knew that Fawley had arrived.

He was seated on the settee. His bag, bulging no doubt with his night attire and shaving tackle, besides his professional papers, stood nearby, with his hat and raincoat dropped over it. He was reading a novel.

She came in briskly, dropped the letters, newspaper, her handbag and gloves, and the small package which contained the cut of salmon, on a side table and came towards him.

He had risen with the novel still in his hand. She had not seen him for two months, but their casual greeting did not remark that interval, or their pleasure at meeting. It indicated instead their perfect understanding of each other, and their friendship which did not so much depend

upon their occasional meetings as upon certain similarities of character and outlook.

"If I had known you were here, I wouldn't have given Charles and Edna as much of my salmon as I did," she said. "What time does your train go?"

"A quarter to ten."

"Time for something to eat," she said, unwrapping the salmon and showing it to him. "There's enough for the two of us."

He reached for his bag.

"I brought a couple of cucumbers, Bertha. And some coffee. Let me make dinner, will you?"

She handed the fish to him.

"Willingly!" she said. "You're the perfect guest, with your two cucumbers and your talent in the kitchen."

She removed her hat and light coat and sank into a chair.

In her manner there was nothing of her usual buoyancy. Her optimism had flagged, and she appeared pre-occupied. He was quick to notice it. She sat with her arms extended along the arms of the big chair and her gaze upon the sour little garden beyond the open window. A woman pondering a problem, he thought, leaving her.

She heard him in the kitchen and forgot about him. She had three urgent letters to write, but they could wait. First of all, she had to look fairly and squarely at a certain circumstance which might very likely determine into a scandal of some magnitude. And since Edna was her closest friend, she felt that she could not leave her to solve the problem unaided.

Bertha was fifty. The furrier's business which she owned and conducted had come into her possession when her father had died. She was then twenty-five and, up to that time, had never turned her head in the direction of

the business. Her mother had been dead for ten years, and Bertha had kept house for her father since that time. This house, and a larger one near Guildford.

She could look back on those years and see what a pleasant pastime it had been. Never a dull moment! All the fun of London, and the fun of country life. And the ambition to become a novelist.

She entered the business and met the skeptical looks of her father's customers and his old employees. She knew nothing about the business, nothing about employees, nothing about customers. She had only the desire to learn. One thing had helped her then and ever since.

She had a habit of examining problems patiently and reasonably, without fretting, without anger, fear, or any other emotion that might cloud them. She had, as well, a strong moral sense.

This sort of wisdom and honesty lay at the heart of her success. Also, it guided her in her personal relationships and the rest of her private life. She felt that it was a good rule of behavior, particularly with regard to all the huge, universal problems that floated over international and national affairs, never to attempt to find solutions until one had first of all clearly stated all the terms of the problem.

"Bertha!" Chris called.

She got up unwillingly and went to the kitchen. He was looking for the ingredients of a sauce.

"Here," she said, opening a cupboard.

Again, he noticed her preoccupied, troubled manner. And this time, he spoke about it.

"What's gone wrong, Bertha?"

Nothing would have pleased her more than to discuss the problem with him.

"I'm tempted to tell you," she said.

"Fire away!"

She shook her head. "It wouldn't really help. It's one of those affairs that become larger when they're passed on to other people."

"Why were you tempted to tell me?" he said.

"Because I'm interested to know what you would say."

He did not comment on that. Nor did he try to guess what was troubling her. She was a sensible woman, and he knew that her character was strong enough to survive the inevitable collisions of life. And if she had problems, her excellent mind required no assistance, and no moral guidance, in reaching a decision. Indeed, were he ever faced with a personal dilemma of his own, it would be to her that he would turn if he needed advice.

He finished preparing dinner. By then, Bertha had set the table. They sat down to the meal. And again, and this time not without some anxiety, he noticed her preoccupation and dismay. Whatever it was that troubled her was, he believed, almost comparable to the size and strength of her character, for only an affair of significant proportions could disturb the course of her sanguine temperament and engross her like this.

"You baked this perfectly, Chris," she said; then she looked up at him, smiling.

"You are so darned independent and self-reliant!" she said.

"You needn't envy me, Bertha."

"You even keep your troubles to yourself!"

He smiled faintly. "I'm full of troubles," he said.

"Seriously . . . is that true?"

"The job," he said, tersely.

"But you can discuss them with your assistants?"

That amused him. "Try bringing such things before a committee of scientific experts!"

"Well, what's the alternative?"

"To sort 'em out oneself," he said.

After a pause, Bertha asked, "What do you do when you run into a really big problem?"

He surprised her by laughing loudly.

"I don't run into it! I'm there, all the time, with the problem around me. Not only a few specific problems, but larger ones, fundamental ones. Issues, if you like to call them that. Incessant, the nature of reality, existence. One immense problem."

"Perhaps you're right," she said. "It puts smaller ones in proper proportion."

"Does it?"

"But what exactly do you do when one arises?" she said.

"Oh . . . go back a bit. Check everything."

"And suppose there hasn't been an error?"

"In that case," he said, "it's a question of method, approach, attack, whatever you like to call it."

"So you go back to a certain point, and then begin again from there?"

He studied her frankly for several seconds, realizing that she was trying to apply his methods to her own difficulties.

"Not invariably. Quite often—just go on."

"Knowing that you're working on a weak method, a wrong method?" she said.

"It appears to be wrong. But presently, merely by continuing in it, cautiously, the fault reveals itself quite plainly. The solution comes into sight. Then you go back and reach it by another method."

She seemed happier after that. Had there been time, he would have enjoyed taking the conversation beyond that point. But he dared not linger over the meal. Bertha



ordered a taxi for him and cut sandwiches of pâté which she gave to him for his night journey. There was just time for coffee before the taxi arrived.

When they were saying good-bye, she asked him a question which she had always refrained from putting to him during his former visits.

"When will you be back, Chris?"

As though to say, I require to know this because I wish to invite someone here.

Except when he was going on vacation, he was always most careful to say nothing at all about his journeys, absences, or future plans and dates. He answered her with nothing more than a quick shrug. A moment later, he went out to the taxi. She waved quickly to him when the vehicle drove off, and closing the house door, she returned to the dining room and began to clear the table.

The doorbell rang. She hurried to answer it, thinking that Chris might have returned to collect something which he had forgotten to take with him. It wasn't Chris who was at the door. It was his shadow, Lettie. Even before she opened the door, Bertha thought, "It's Lettie, I'm sure. Always rushing in just before he leaves, or a minute afterwards."

"I knew it was you," she exclaimed, agreeably, to the small, peculiar young woman who seemed to rush into the hall as soon as the door was opened. "His shadow. Popping in just before he leaves, or just afterwards."

Lettie halted abruptly. Everything seemed to wane in her: motion, thought; anticipation, the power of speech. Her ugly little features that were always so attractively gathered into expressions of her swift moods filled with a forlorn look.

"Oh, gosh! Have I just missed him, Bertha?"

"He left two minutes ago."

"Well, if I hurried . . . If I took a taxi . . . Where's he gone to?"

Bertha smiled at this outburst of hope.

"He's gone to catch a train . . ."

"What time? I could see him off . . ."

"You're too late, my dear! The train leaves at a quarter to ten."

"I've got bags of time! I'll get a taxi."

She moved towards the door. "What station is it, Bertha? And where's he traveling to?"

"I don't know," Bertha said, flatly. "I didn't ask him what station and what destination. I never ask Chris questions, and he never mentions his affairs to me. And if I did ask him, he wouldn't answer."

Lettie pouted disconsolately. "I'm always late, always missing him. I'm hopeless, aren't I? But I'm terribly fond of Chris, Bertha. . . ."

"Well, come and help me wash and dry the dinner things."

". . . and I know we're destined to marry each other, some day."

Bertha laughed. "Don't tell him that!"

"I know he's fond of me. He hasn't said so. But whenever he's here, I know it instinctively. I have a sort of prescience . . ."

"Two minutes too late!"

"Yes, but you must admit it proves something. It's happened four times, and this is the fifth, so there must be a sort of bond between the two of us. If I'm conscious of it, he ought to be. Does he ever say anything about me, Bertha?"

"Never. He's never mentioned your name . . ."

"Have you, ever, to him? I suppose he just laughed. That's all he ever does to me. I'm a sort of joke to him. I

know I'm a hopeless dimwit, but Chris is the only man I've ever loved, and I know he and I would be marvelously happy together."

"Here, have a nice cup of coffee. Chris brought me a pound. Try it."

Lettie accepted a cup gratefully and tasted it.

"Gorgeous coffee, Bertha! Where did he get it from? I must get some of it. Show me the packet."

In the kitchen, Bertha produced the packet. Lettie opened it, sniffed the contents, closed the wrapping and examined it.

"Look at that!" she said. "The maker's name has been torn off. It's from France, isn't it? Or . . . where? Look at it."

"With a name like that," Bertha said, "it could just as well come from Blackpool."

"Did it? Did he say?"

"I didn't ask. There's another packet. Would you like it?"

"Bertha, you're such a pal!"

"Well, drink your coffee and help me dry these dishes."

Three years ago, Lettie had answered Bertha's advertisement for an experienced, intelligent secretary. She was an honors graduate in Modern Languages of London University, was twenty-three at that time, had had a year's experience in an office, and seemed a capable person. After a month with Bertha, she had the good sense to resign before Bertha was compelled to dismiss her. Lettie was hopelessly incompetent. She was clever, but she lacked a sense of order. She muddled everything, almost deliberately. And she knew it.

"I'd better save you from the unpleasant task of turning me out, Bertha. I'm a dimwit. I've got another job. If I stayed here any longer, I'd only irritate you."

As Bertha realized, there was a good deal of common sense in a woman who could appreciate her own limitations and resign before they made trouble. She liked Lettie, and had made a friend of her, probably because this compactly built, impetuous, loquacious, chaotic little woman, with her plain, untidy hair, her restless temperament, and her beautiful clothes appealed to her as a personality.

Beneath what was visible and audible of Lettie, there seemed to Bertha to reside another Lettie: an extremely intelligent woman, clever, well informed, of fine judgment, but somehow ousted by the parody which she made of herself. In spite of this amusing parody which chattered so much and which was so intent upon confessing her hopelessness and general futility, as well as her eccentric notions, the authentic Lettie was the one to whom Bertha always addressed herself, giving only a whimsical attention to the other. The real Lettie was her friend. The other was quite frequently a nuisance. There was a word for it, amongst all the other mumbo-jumbo of labels. Schizophrenia.

"Me, a schizo?" Lettie exclaimed.

"You pretend to be. It must be because you are happier pretending to be muddled, than you are being quite clever and rather lonely in your cleverness," Bertha said.

Lettie shrieked with laughter. "Oh, gosh! Me, lonely in my cleverness!"

"You are as smart as new paint. But you aren't integrated."

"I know. I'm pretty hopeless, aren't I?"

"That's rubbish. Why do you say it?"

"But it's part of my disintegration. It must be."

Bertha laughed. "You have exquisite taste. You learned shorthand in a week, and typing in a fortnight. And a

month ago, when you first came to this office, you grasped everything in two days. You are fluent in three languages. And behind all the nonsense you jabber, you have the most rational and original ideas I've ever heard from anyone, Doctor Fawley included."

The exciting little face with its snub nose and eager eyes filled with a doleful expression.

"That's me, I suppose. Chaos, Bertha. Elemental chaos. I ought to have children. I'd give birth to geniuses, because their father's characteristics would shape the chaos they'd get from me. I'm a futile ball of rubbish. Gosh, if it weren't for my private income, I'd be in the gutter. I'm a socialist, but there again I'm not integrated. I daren't tell my socialist friends about my three hundred a year. A rentier, that's what I am. A parasite. Of course, I can tell you this, because you are a blasted Tory boss, aren't you?"

"I wish you would stay on in your job," Bertha said. "You aren't really the chump you pretend to be. You muddle everything up, but the funny thing is that you always know where the least thing is put."

But Lettie had departed. She became secretary to a firm of house agents and valuers. Three months later, she resigned to take a job with an exporter. She remained six weeks in his employment and left to become secretary-receptionist to a psychologist. She liked this job best of all the ones she had held because it was well paid and part-time. She had every afternoon free from three until six, and had only to return for an hour. The psychologist interested her. She told Bertha, "He's promised to analyze me and help me to integrate myself. Gosh, we have the most marvelous talks! He's got a colossal mind . . ."

"Larger than Chris Fawley's?" Bertha asked.

"Of course not!"

"But a splendid physique? Tall and impressive?"



Lettie flushed and was silent. Actually, her employer was a diminutive man, with the face of a cheeky school-boy of eighteen, and the personality which, without the force of his weirdly consistent behavior, would have destined him for an asylum for the insane. But she did not wish to describe his appearance.

She left his employment before he had time to integrate her. She had been influenced by him, however, to the extent of taking up a job among the homeless and destitute.

"What's it like?" Bertha asked, when Lettie called on her.

"Oh, gosh! Helping beggars find shelter for the night. That sort of thing. A hot meal and a bed for the night. And tea and bread in the morning."

"What suddenly induced you to take up a thing like that? Is your heart really in this job?"

"You should see some of the types that drift in! I never imagined . . ."

"What made you give up a decent post for that?"

"I thought I might be able to help, by making myself useful."

That was last winter. Lately, Lettie had been without work.

"Have you found anything to do yet?" Bertha said.

Lettie stirred her coffee and sipped it.

"Can I have a slice of bread, Bertha? With some of that pâté on it."

"I'm so sorry, Lettie. Why didn't you tell me you hadn't had dinner?"

"Didn't think of it until I noticed the loaf there."

"Let me make you something. An omelette . . ."

"I'd love it, but I can't stay. My landlady is retiring, and I've been traipsing about all day, looking at flats and rooms. I've got to see one at ten, tonight."

She cut herself a thick slice of bread and spread the pâté thinly on it. With the cup in one hand, and the bread in the other, she sat on the kitchen table and swung her legs. Bertha finished washing the dinner things and began drying them. She faced Lettie and watched her.

"You make life seem like a lark, a game," Bertha said. "You're not really serious about it, or yourself."

Lettie munched bread and stopped swinging her legs.

"Do you like my skirt, Bertha?" she said, looking at it and then at Bertha.

Bertha put aside a dry plate and took up a wet one.

"What do you really think, when you aren't chattering?" she said. "What do you do with all your—look at you now, Lettie; you sit there like a kid at a party, asking me what I think of your new skirt. And all the time you're thinking of something else! I can tell it by the look in your eyes. You haven't the eyes of a dimwit . . ."

"I know," Lettie said. "They're not bad. Do you think Chris has noticed them? He thinks I'm a frightful fool. Whenever he looks at me, he grins, as if he can't understand how a thing like me came into existence and manages to remain in it. I feel like something you pay sixpence to see at a fair."

She put down her empty cup and swallowed the last morsel of bread.

"Look at the time! I'll have to dash. Thanks for the coffee and the nice bread."

She kissed Bertha's cheek and hurried into the drawing room. "Where did I leave my coat and handbag?"

"In the dining room . . ."

"Gosh, I'm hopeless! Why do you have so many rooms, and names for all of them?"

She laughed gaily, as though everything, literally everything were amusing, part of an abiding happiness.

"Drawing room, dining room! Where's your morning room, Bertha? One of the destitutes in my last job told me that he was born in a back room, and he never went into the front room until he was ten. It had bamboo furniture, and a fern, he called it a maidenhair fern, in a big green pot in the window, and only the adults in the family used that room. The kids weren't allowed in. Sometimes it was the front room, other times it was called the best room."

She was running about and gathering her things and scrambling into her coat and looking at her reflection in the nearest mirror. The one above the side table.

"Is this tonight's paper, Bertha? I haven't seen a newspaper for three days. Can I . . . look . . . the headlines . . ."

She scanned them rapidly.

"Festival . . . Attlee silent about election . . . Eva Droumek arrives in England . . ."

She dropped the paper and touched the flimsy little hat on her head.

"Gosh, I'm late. Bertha, you look frantically solemn! Thanks for everything, dear . . ."

"Let me know if you get the flat. . . ."

"Bertha, is anything worrying you? What's on your mind?"

Bertha grimaced. "You and Chris are the only people I'd care to tell. But neither of you has time to listen."

"You don't mean to say that after all you've done for him, he had no time to listen? The ungrateful . . ."

"Don't be silly. I hadn't the heart to tell him. I didn't push my troubles on to him. . . ."

Suddenly, Lettie was serious.

"Shall I stay? Never mind about the flat."

For the first time in their friendship, the authentic Lettie emerged. The woman of cleverness, poise, self-

confidence, and talents. She was drawing off her gloves, and her eyes that were always so alert and so reflective of her rational mind were looking intently at Bertha and probing her.

"Bertha, if there's anything I could do . . ."

As though, already, she fully understood the whole problem and was willing to offer a solution.

"No, my dear, really, thanks, but it isn't worth making a fuss about."

Bertha opened the house door. "Let me know how you get on."

When she closed the door and returned to the drawing room she wondered what Chris and Lettie would have said had she told them what she knew about Eva Droumek and Charles. She tried hard to think. She knew Chris and Lettie as well as she knew her other friends, yet in this matter she could not conceive the kind of response which they would have made had she said to them, "That refugee, Eva Droumek, is bogus. She's either a spy or something to do with one of these noisy and nasty Communist Committees that prove themselves right and everybody else wrong."

The trouble was that the experience which the situation represented was entirely new to her. Nothing like it had ever disturbed her life. Many refugees had come to her and been given work; and all of them had breathed the unmistakable air of people who had suffered the reality of physical, mental, and spiritual cruelty which had left scars upon them. But this Droumek woman, bold, coarse, reflecting so much of the worst side of Charles' character, emitted only guile, an air of positive evil. A spy? An agitator? A dyed-in-the-blood Communist? They were all so much the creatures of fiction, of a kind of fantasy which, when it collided with actuality, was—she remem-

bered details from trials—drab and tarnished and base.

She sighed. "What in the name of goodness do you do when one of them drops into your life?" she said, aloud. Then, grimacing, she shrugged her big shoulders and sat down to write to her aunt in Torquay.

*. . . . so glad you got through the winter without a cold. How are your three Siamese cats, and how do they get along with the tiny fox cub you said you found? I suppose the cub will have to be destroyed eventually, or can you possibly train it to behave itself and become a pleasant member of your household?*

Then she paused because a solution of the problem which disturbed her had suggested itself. She wrote no more of the letter that day but sat considering what she and Edna could do regarding Eva Droumek.

"Not exactly the sort of creature one could make a pet of," she thought, sardonically. "But if she gets permission to stay, she might turn out to be quite docile. If we show her where she stands."

But although that seemed to be a solution, more difficulties grew from it.

"Like keeping a tiger in your back yard," she thought.



Lettie hurried when she left Bertha's house. At the end of the street, she hailed a taxi and told the driver to take her to Praed Street. When they reached it, he asked her what number.

"Stop here, please," she said.

She took the first bus which stopped nearby. After a few minutes, she alighted, getting up from her seat and hurrying out to the bus platform when the vehicle was a few yards from the stop.

"Please!" she panted at the conductress; and when the bus slowed down, she stepped off nimbly, the only passenger alighting at that place. Another bus was approaching her, on the opposite side of the road. She waited until a solitary car had gone past, then she ran across the roadway and boarded the bus. It traveled swiftly along the empty street. The conductor was upstairs. Lettie stood for a few seconds on the platform, looking back. She was quite certain that nobody was following her.

She alighted at Marble Arch and walked a short distance into Oxford Street, turning into Portman Street, and then turning right. Then left, then right, then left. Left, right, on and around and back again, until she was quite sure that if she were being followed she had eluded the pursuit.

She stopped before a house with railings, looked in her handbag, brought out the tiny mirror and held it as though she were examining her reflection. What she saw

was as good as a glance over her shoulder. The deserted street.

She ran up the steps. She hadn't to ring. The door was opened at once. She entered the house, and the old man in a neat gray suit closed the door behind her.

"He's upstairs, miss."

Lettie went up the broad stairs and tapped on the door of a room overlooking the street and went in. A tall, thin man of about fifty-eight, with a small head and a sharp nose, sat reading in an armchair which, with an old roll-top desk and a carpet and one small chair, was the only furniture in the large room. He rose when Lettie came in.

"Good evening, Colonel," Lettie said, looking around. "Is this where I am to live?"

His gaze followed her critical glances, and he hastened to tell her, "There is also a bathroom and a small kitchen, with a gas cooker. Do you cook by gas?"

Lettie said, "I cook by guess, sir."

The Colonel smiled. "Won't you sit down?" he said, indicating the armchair. And while Lettie seated herself in the armchair, he dropped his magazine on the desk and said, "I'll have some more furniture brought here for you, so that you will be quite comfortable."

He spoke briskly and in a considerate tone, looking intently at her with his little keen eyes that were already dimming with age. He had a great admiration for her talents. For the past two years she had worked under his orders on an extremely dangerous task which was now all the more perilous because its successful conclusion was within sight. Her courage alone was a talent in itself.

"Thank you," Lettie said. "When do I move in?"

"Tomorrow?"

"Yes, very well."

He took the small chair and placed it near the arm-

chair and sat down, crossing his legs. His white hair was sparse and brushed flat. He had a pleasant, alert face, with a happy expression. He was very spruce, in a light herringbone suit, a tailored shirt, and a gray silk tie fastened in a tiny knot. His attitudes were those of a young man, and his manner had the same quality, so that it was fascinating to work for this zestful man. Lettie had a considerable admiration for his uncanny knowledge of human nature and the skill with which he anticipated all the moves of his opponents. As one of his staff, she had a particularly difficult task in her present assignment; but although the dangers were constant, the influence of his clever character and his experienced personality always excited her and somehow diminished those perils so that she often enjoyed them. All the same, she would not be sorry when the Droumek case was concluded and she would no longer have to consort with Droumek's subordinates as one of them.

"Well?" the Colonel said, resting his hands on his knee.

She gave him a succinct account of the day's activities in the little camp of foreign secret agents where she was accepted as a confederate. Then she described her own day. She told how she had taken a taxi and concealed herself in it to watch Eva Droumek's arrival at the block of flats where Charles lived. She related how she had seen Charles arrive, then Eva, and presently Vort and one of his men called Nobs.

"Why were they there?" the Colonel asked.

"They were trying to find if Eva had arrived safely. Also, they are doubtful about Charles."

The Colonel was astounded. "But Charles . . ."

"Not long after Eva had arrived, he came out. And I must say he looked far from happy. Vort was watching him from a distance, and Nobs—dressed to look like a

beggar selling matches—spoke to him. Charles behaved like a man in panic.”

She paused so as to give the Colonel a chance to comment upon that, but he was silent. He nodded his head.

“And that was the opinion of Vort, when I went back to them at the house. I did my best to soothe him and persuade him that all was going well now that Eva Droumek had arrived. He perked up, after that. Then he sprang a surprise on me. It appears that yesterday he got Nobs to disguise himself as someone from a government office—black hat and jacket, and striped trousers—and to go to the building where Fawley’s committee meets. There, Nobs asked the doorman in which room he could find Dr. Fawley.”

She smiled. “You know, Colonel, like Puritanism, the remains of the spirit of feudalism are rooted in the English character. Vort knew that, when he sent Nobs—suitably dressed, and suitably mannered—to that doorman who, with all the respect and deference which appearances can still exact, especially from doormen, was promptly told that Dr. Fawley wasn’t due until tomorrow—that’s today—when his committee was to meet at ten-thirty in the morning.”

The Colonel said, “That’s the price we pay for—whatever it is we think we are getting.”

She continued, “Vort ordered me to follow Fawley when the committee meeting was likely to be ended, and not to miss him again, as I had always done before. I went this evening, knowing that Fawley’s meetings last all day. I picked Fawley up as soon as I saw him come from the building. He had a start of twenty yards, and I thought he would go either to Edna and Charles, or to Bertha.

Just then, I was lucky enough to spot Vort. He was on my tracks."

The Colonel frowned with surprise but said nothing. Lettie continued, "I feel that Vort is beginning to realize that I am what I am. It was not pleasant to discover him, and I'm afraid I lost my temper with him. However, he was impressed when I accused him of mistrusting me, and when I told him that he had better find someone else to help him. I went back to the house, in a taxi, with him. Then I set out again. I went to Bertha Grigg and was just in time to see Fawley's taxi disappear from sight. He had been there and was setting out for the station. So once more I must go back and confess failure to Vort."

"If he were not such a diabolically clever beast, in some ways, you could give him a morsel of harmless information to keep him soothed," the Colonel said. "But he is shrewd enough to realize that you felt it was necessary to do that. Then his suspicions would be confirmed. So you had better not feed him anything."

"Quite," Lettie said.

"Because the least suspicion arising among them now and convincing them that they are encompassed by us would send them into cover, just when I am anxious for them to come right out into the open," the Colonel said. "I don't need to impress on you the need for the most rigorous caution."

"The fact is, sir, that something worse than suspicion has overtaken them," Lettie said.

And in answer to his question, she went on, "I have already told you that Charles is, or was when I caught a glimpse of him, in panic. I am quite sure that something took place in his flat between himself and Droumek, his wife, and Bertha."



"But you have just said that Bertha was at home this evening."

"I have an idea that she must have called for a few minutes on Edna, before going home. Just to verify that, may I use your telephone?"

"Downstairs," the Colonel said.

She asked him to come down with her while she made the call. She spoke to Bertha.

"Bertha! Lettie here. I've got the flat. It's an absolute bargain. I think I'll splash a bit of capital and furnish it nicely. I wonder if that friend of yours—the one who has such good taste in fabrics—would advise me, Edna. Do you think she would mind? Would you ask her for me, and say I'm awfully sorry I've never visited her? But you know how busy I've been hunting for a new home for myself. How is she?"

"She's fine, thanks. I saw her for half an hour this evening, and I'll be seeing her tomorrow," Bertha said. "I'll ask her for you, about furnishings. I'm sure she'll be delighted to help you choose something."

"Thanks so much, Bertha. I'll be seeing you soon."

Lettie replaced the receiver and turned to the Colonel.

"She was there, as I thought," she said. "And when I saw her this evening, she had a problem on her mind. It was impossible not to realize that she was worried. I gave her plenty of opportunity to divulge it to me, but she said nothing. And not a word about Edna. Which makes me believe that she shares whatever trouble there is at this moment in Charles' home."

She and the Colonel returned to the upper room and sat down.

"It could be quite a spot of bother," the Colonel said.

"For them, or for us?"

"For all of us."

"Why for us? We hold the whip hand, and they don't know it."

"What sort of situation do you think has developed in that flat to put Charles into a panic, and upset your friend Bertha?"

"I don't know. I can only make a guess," Lettie said.

"Well?"

"Suppose—suppose this ruse of Eva Droumek's is transparent to Edna, or Bertha, or both of them. And suppose that both of them have made it plain to Charles that it is."

The Colonel rose. He was not often perturbed, and when he was he seldom showed it.

"I hope and pray that such an almighty tricky situation as that has not arisen," he said, earnestly.

His fingers beat a little tattoo against one another. Lettie laughed softly.

"You are very concerned for Charles' sake, sir!"

"Oh, not his," he said, almost rancorously. "I am not thinking of his wretched skin. It's ours . . ."

"Colonel," Lettie pleaded, "ever since we got word from our people abroad that something was brewing in the other camp, we have been on their tracks. You instructed me to apply for the secretarial job in Bertha's business, because she was Fawley's friend and had given him a room in her flat. Next I went here and there, and then to the real brains of the party, the Doctor. And then to Vort and his cell. And now the whole crowd is gathered. Eva Droumek is present. And she is the person we have been expecting. I haven't been Vort's secretary in his business and his shadow as well for almost a year without getting all the facts you needed. Eva Droumek is the person all of us have awaited. Now that she is at last present, why not close the net and arrest all of them? This is the

moment, and the climax, and the chance which we've hoped for during years of . . ."

But he was shaking his head; and she was too tired and too hoarse after talking for hours with Vort to argue with him.

"My throat is as dry as—I can't say another word, sir," she said. "But I wish you would take this opportunity and scoop them into the bag."

"No," he said, crisply. "We must be absolutely certain that Droumek is the person. Remember this: we are matching ourselves against an opponent who goes at a thing with all the brilliant cunning of psychological devices. And we dare not snap at his bait until we are absolutely sure . . ."

"How are we to reach this—sureness?" Lettie croaked.

"We dig in. We . . ." Then he broke off and smiled and said softly, "It's a military strategy, or the hunter's stalk. One digs in and waits with enormous patience, until the enemy or the prey makes a move. Then . . . one acts. And in this case, we shall not know if Droumek is our quarry until she acts. When she does, then will be the time to strike. But forgive me. Let me give you something to drink."

He went to the desk and took a bottle of orange squash and a tumbler. He went into the adjoining bathroom to fill the glass with water. While he was absent, Lettie took out her cigarette case. Then she frowned. The Colonel objected to women smoking. She sighed, and put back the case into her handbag. Almost immediately, the Colonel returned and offered her the glass of orangeade. She accepted it gratefully.

"You do understand my point?" he said, seating himself before her. And when she said yes, he went on, "Because behind their devilish logic, they are appallingly cunning."

In fact, one could say that they just do not make mistakes. Their plans are based upon a really masterly appreciation of human behavior which meets every eventuality."

"If I had not had some years' experience at close hand of the instruments of their plans, my morale might be upset by what you are saying, Colonel," Lettie said, after sipping the drink. "A plan is one thing. It might represent perfection. But human beings operating a plan—they are never anything but what we all are. I understand your point, but I don't share your theory. I don't believe that Droumek is just bait for us to swallow while our opponents are busy with another cell of their agents. I am convinced that she is the person we have all of us expected for two years. But, of course, you can rely on me to carry out your orders, and wait for the moment when she shows her hand."

"I appreciate the extreme difficulty of your duties in all this," he said. "But I assure you the result will be worth-while. I am so sure that we were intended to take this bait. It was so boldly and cleverly thrown that I reasoned we should take it as our opponents hoped that we would, and let her come in. Which means, of course, that if we are to induce them to believe we have swallowed the bait we simply must not give them the least sign of our presence."

Lettie thought for a while.

"We hadn't much choice in the matter, had we? It wasn't a question of taking the bait and letting her come in. With such a storm of sympathy rising and demanding that she should be given asylum, she was more or less forced on us. I know that Vort was delighted. He roared with laughter."

The Colonel smiled. "It was not the public who set

things in motion. In spite of what is said and written about them, for them life is a matter of daily bread and personal relationships, and the home and family. And after that, recreation. Man belongs to a kind of order which was created out of primeval chaos, and his genius reflects that order in his personal life. He'll respond, sometimes, to external influences that appeal to his emotions. But he didn't start the ball rolling in this matter. It was the press that began it. Droumek's story—well authenticated—was first-rate for the 'human angle,' and also as a counterblast to Communism. It was too good to be left alone. But I can tell you something in confidence. If I had not demanded a clear passage for her, she would now be back in Prague."

"I did have an inkling that others, besides us, knew that she was not genuine," Lettie said. "But I quite thought that she was let in because there was absolutely no shred of evidence against her."

The Colonel shook his head. "For all our intense efforts, there isn't as much as a microscopic piece of evidence against her, so to speak, from abroad. All the same, a certain government department refused to give the word for her to come in. They said no. They simply did not believe her story. It wasn't a question of bowing to popular clamor. Nations aren't governed by popular outcries, although some people imagine they can be. Human story or not, she would have been refused entry if I hadn't had my way."

He went on gravely, "They went all colors. Red with exasperation. White with nervousness. Black with perplexity. I felt very sorry for them, because to let her in suggests that what half the world thinks of her is true of her, and that this government department also accepts her story as being authentic. I had an almighty tussle to



get them to grant my request. The deuce of it was that when they asked for proof of her identity as an agent for the other camp, I had nothing to show them. Poor devils, they were anxious to send her packing because they suspected her of being what I said she was! But they demanded proof from me when I said she was a foreign agent!"

Then he became serious. "But you realize what a truly ghastly scandal will ensue if the situation splits open from Charles' panic, or from something which happens between himself, his wife, Eva Droumek, and Bertha. The press would grab at the story. The public will gasp to think that a Communist spy was allowed entry to the country. No explanation at all could be offered, of course. Imagine it! Questions in the House. Motions of no confidence. A government could fall on such an issue. And we'd take a terrible rap. So—at all costs, we must do our best to keep Vort and the Doctor and Charles—all of them—in a state of confidence, soothed."

"But when, and if, you take Droumek and the others into custody, and she is sentenced or deported, won't that be a story that will undermine public confidence?" Lettie said.

"No. She'll be handled very quietly. And if news leaks out, our vigilance or whatever they like to call it will be commended. We shall be in the position of—alert public servants, shall I say? Meanwhile, it is most imperative that Vort should be inspired to recover his confidence. You had better persuade him that Droumek is quite comfortable and secure in the flat . . ."

"And is having the time of her life," Lettie interjected, putting aside the empty tumbler.

"I sincerely hope that she is."

Lettie rose. "It must be hell in that flat."

"I daresay. But as long as they keep it to themselves, all will be well for us."

Lettie smiled as she gathered her handbag and gloves.

"It must be a kind of deadlock, if it is what I imagine it to be. Edna cannot very well denounce Droumek without ruining Charles, and Bertha dare not say a word for fear of bringing trouble on her friends. And as for Droumek, she sits tight."

"And what about Charles?" the Colonel said, anxiously.

Lettie shrugged her shoulders. "If he were as fanatical a Communist as the Doctor, he would drive clean through this dilemma. As it is, he'll just stew. And Edna will see to it that he keeps his nerve. But meanwhile, I suppose the rest of us must wait until—how long did they say?"

"A week. I asked them not to hurry, looking into things. I don't want Droumek to suspect that we are too anxious to make her comfortable."

"If I may say so, I think it is Charles who is reaping the most comfort from us," Lettie said. "Not that he knows it."

"The more the better."

At the door, Lettie paused. "I could do with a little of it, but mine . . ."

"And mine, too, I assure you."

"All goes to him."

"Well, if it preserves our plans . . ."

And thinking about the word, Lettie said, "Preserving . . ."

"Security, of course," he said. "But actually I imagine that, in a small way, we are making a retort to the philosophy of Karl Marx."

He shrugged his thin shoulders disdainfully. "He happens to have been a philosopher for whom I have no respect. He was a self-confessed tyrant to his wife, and he

made very little attempt to support himself and his wife and children. He was content to sponge money from his friends. His life was squalid in every way. He was too intent upon telling the world how to conduct its affairs to pay serious attention to his own responsibilities as a husband and father. His wife died an agonizing death, and one of his daughters committed suicide. I don't believe that from such a man anything sane or wholesome could issue for the benefit of the human race."

His expression relented. "Don't tell Vort that," he said. "Oh, Vort is all for Nietzsche."

The Colonel made a disparaging gesture with his thin hand. "Just such another. Quite irrational . . ."

He must have noticed the flicker of surprise in Lettie's features, for he said quickly, "Oh, it's quite possible for a highly intelligent man to live, consistently, and work, consistently, on a single note of irrationality amounting to lunacy."

She said good night to him and hurried off to return to Vort and have her quarrel with him; but for several minutes she thought about the Colonel's opinion of Marx and Nietzsche, both of whom she had studied.

"Irrationality. Lunacy," she thought. "What does he know about philosophy? Giving forth like that! That's one thing about Vort, he is intellectual."



TWO

THE ALARM





## 18

Tuesday morning. And, with its advent, an altogether new shape and direction transforming Charles' life, beginning with the image of himself which hitherto had seemed so attractive to him.

He rose from sleep with a heavy sense of foreboding which instantly illumined his recollection of yesterday's events and painfully urged his imagination to explore this new day. But he no longer trusted his imagination to conjecture accurately the course of events, the consequences of them, or the reactions of other people to them. It was futile to put on the old mask and assume the old attitudes to meet a crisis which would demand sincerity. But without that mask what was he?

He got out of bed and dressed before the mirror, seeing as he rose Edna's empty bed, hearing her already at work in the kitchen. He felt censured by the silence in which she had risen, dressed, and left him. And looking at his reflection, he saw only the traitor, the troubled being inwardly trembling with guilt. He turned away. He had fallen from grace in his own sight.

Yet, when he sat down to breakfast opposite Edna, he recognized in her amiable manner the easy mode of their lives before Eva Droumek's arrival. She faced him

without a trace of rancor. She had the same natural grace, the same contented, agreeable expression as formerly. He recognized it, and yet it seemed altogether new to him and he could not find in himself the exact mood with which to respond to it. His whole manner was subdued, almost surly. He couldn't ascend to the old heartiness.

He wasn't prepared for such moderate treatment from her. The possibility that she might behave with such leniency and tact had not occurred to him; and even if it had he would have dismissed it as being quite unlikely. It perplexed him, and depressed him. He sensed the spirit of truth, decency, integrity which she represented and which he had lost. And from outside there came the sounds of a world in which he could have had his place more securely than upon the unworthy foundation which he had chosen.

He inclined his head over his plate. He saw his letters and the morning newspaper beside him, but he could not resume the old habits and open his correspondence or the newspaper and, with his former liveliness, toss to Edna the headlines, the sentences, and his comments for her to reflect upon. He couldn't assume the mood, the mental pose.

And yet she seemed to await it, as before. At last, in her usual agreeable tone, she said suavely, "What's the news?"

He hesitated, taking up the newspaper to pass it to her. "Read it to me," she said.

He could not repress his grimace when he unfolded the paper. The headlines at one side ran at him.

### EVA DROUMEK ARRIVES

Below, there was a photograph of her, taken at the airport. For a moment, his glance rested on Edna. He passed the newspaper to her and resumed his meal.

It was all that he could expect. From all sides, from the most unforeseen, unpredictable sources, it would leap at him: this topic. He noticed Edna putting aside the newspaper. She was looking directly at him. He ventured to lift his head and glance at her. She had a tremulous smile struggling on her features, and a look of interrogation which he failed to understand. And almost immediately she lowered her head as though she were guilty of some daring misdemeanor which she hesitated to confess.

A rush of fantastic surmises flooded his thoughts.

"Where is she?" he asked.

Edna raised her head. "Oh, I gave her breakfast in bed."

He nodded in approval. "And . . . what do you propose . . . What have you in mind for today?" he said.

"I must see Mary."

"Of course."

"I thought—after that—I'd take the guest around the shops. She seems to believe that there's nothing . . ."

"I heard her," he interjected quietly.

"Charles," she said, in a breathless tone, as though she were trying to snatch at him before the conversation dissolved, "what is she? You kept hinting, last night, that she's . . ."

"Do you really want me to tell you?" he said, unhappily.

She was silent for a while.

"I understand," she said. "I just wanted to be quite sure."

He longed to ask her why, and what she proposed doing, saying. But he feared a rebuff.

"Charles, if you knew, why did you invite her here?"

The question confused him. He wanted to answer it, but he hesitated to divulge anything that might have the

effect of strengthening Edna in some resolve which would add to his anxiety. He shrugged his shoulders. He was choosing his words. He wanted to make it seem that he had behaved generously but recklessly. But her next question came too soon.

"It was all decided a long time ago, I suppose?" she said.

He did not speak. After a little while, he realized that his silence was an affirmative answer.

"But for what reason—you, in your position—to help in such a despicable scheme. That's what I simply cannot fathom. It amounts to treason, high treason."

Her voice, restrained, scarcely above a whisper, and devoid of reproach, and strangely without any emphasis of alarm or anxiety, continued like an accompaniment to his heaving thoughts. Her questions, her shrewd conjectures, her comments, still gave no indication of her intentions. They merely brought her face to face with him at last, across the distance which he had created.

"So you are one of them?" she said. "A Communist, a fellow-traveler or crypto, or whatever they are termed."

He waited for the contempt, the inevitable scornful criticism, and the reproach which he felt she would surely express now. But there was nothing like that.

Looking at her, he saw only a kind of relief reflected in her expression, and a curious imperturbability in her attitude as she sat there stirring her coffee, cutting her toast.

He gave her time, but the minutes passed and she was silent. It hadn't surprised her, after all. For months, for years, she had patiently groped her way to him, and now that she had overtaken him she saw quite clearly what she had previously seen indistinctly. It didn't alter the problem one way or the other. But strangely enough,



she appeared happier, at least for the few minutes until he departed.

She said the usual things when he set out. He had a sudden impulse to ask her what she intended doing now that she was in full possession of all the facts. Her hand rested on his arm. She was smiling and awaiting the usual kiss. It all seemed to him to indicate her decision to act and to settle the entire matter quickly and cleverly in a way which she had discovered.

The usual perfunctory kiss which he gave her could have been an expression of his mistrust of her decision. It did not respond to her sanguine air which did not alter his own entire dissatisfaction with himself or resurrect for him his lost self-esteem.

He went out with a feeling of embarking upon a new and unfamiliar venture. Everything still wore its old hue and was in its familiar shape, but it was subtly transformed because he himself was transformed.

The tattered beggar met him a short distance from the building, greeted him, winked at him. Charles nodded cautiously. In the murk of his own disreputable spirit, there were furtive accomplices, counterparts of himself. He was not quite alone in his fall.

But he need not have feared the new day and the efforts which its encounters would demand from him. Moment by moment, the old mask, the complete disguise fell upon him. He hadn't to make a conscious effort at all. The very walls, the appointment of his fine room, the familiar aspect of it, the whole pattern which by some conjunction of matter and spirit he had made of the scene, instantly took him and sustained him. The presence of subordinates gave it momentum, purpose, invited him to the expressions, the words, the easily achieved postures. The routine of the day warmed about him. He was instantly

part of it. He had only to float with it. Secretaries were there to welcome him. His clerks greeted him. It was all so easy, like a mere gesture extended, held, accepted.

And the committee, when he sat with it, was pleasant. His seniors were assembled. They addressed him amicably. He felt their regard, their esteem for him, their admiration for his gifts. They solicited his opinions.

He had so much to do. He forgot what lay so abjectly in the shades of his spirit. He was so necessary to something outside himself. He had no opportunity in which to cast a glance into himself and open that shameful scene to his vision. It was far out of sight, behind the day's activities, the cordial encounters, the conferences and minutes.

At lunch, for a depressing moment or two, he appreciated the extent of the problem as it involved Edna, Eva too, and Bertha. He wondered if, like himself, they had momentarily eluded it. His anxieties returned heavily, and for an instant his imagination expanded with them. Then he closed his mind to them and resumed the meal.

Shortly after five in the afternoon, he phoned to Edna. She was taking Eva to a theater.

"Then you'll be dining early?" he said.

"I thought we'd have a light meal at six, and something afterwards," she said. "Shall you be home?"

"No . . . I don't think so, my dear. I'll dine at the club. I'll be there all the evening."

"And meet us with the car after the play?"

"If you wish. Yes . . . That'll be about ten or so."

And when that was decided, he added, "I suppose the two of you have . . . been . . ."

There was a brief silence. "Oh, we—" she began, despondently, then her tone changed abruptly—"we made the rounds of the shops," she added, cheerfully.

"Well, about ten," he said.

And it was then, towards the end of the day's work, that his mood flagged at the prospect of the pendulum's swing into the hours of leisure. Here, he was absorbed by so many things that concerted to fashion the reality of the image of himself. He was restored to himself. His fears had subsided and his imagination was restrained. Now he must face Edna and Eva and meet again the dilemma, the wretched impasse, the truth of himself. And thus, alternately, on each succeeding day . . .

He sat back in his chair and pondered it all again, feeling its dragging weight, hearing its voices, letting his anxieties resume, wondering what was to happen next and what Edna, Bertha, Eva, the Doctor, or that greasy beggar would do.

Around him, in the extensive building, all the sounds that had encompassed him throughout the day were subsiding. There arose others: the many footsteps along the corridors; the voices in conversations, laughter; the closing of doors. Then a hush, and the footsteps of seniors, and the rattle of a solitary typewriter somewhere along the passage. But no bells, no telephones, no more slamming doors. And in the deepening hush, the tumult of London, like a wave seething in the distance. Fragments of it sounded nearby: a car hooting, changing gear; a truck grinding past. Then a pause, and the twittering of birds in a tree outside the window.

The exodus was in full flood, and he was left alone, with nothing in his thoughts except the images of Edna, Eva, Bertha, the Doctor, the beggar. Their voices sounded. His imagination deftly endowed all the images with voices, words, decisions, while for himself there was only the spectator's role.

He sighed, yawned, as he rose to depart. They all had

resolves, whereas he . . . But it was patience he needed, that was all.

He stood for a moment, staring drowsily out of the window, with his hands in his pockets. The hush was deepening. The sibilant twittering of the birds was like voices. . . .

## 19

Vort stood at the window of a little room which faced north. Through a gap in the surrounding buildings, he could see the river's surface shining like chromium in the clear light. He looked upwards at the empty sky through which the slanting sunlight shone.

Behind him, a swarthy little man addressed his back. ". . . and then the subway to Tottenham Court Road and into the Edgware-Morden place, and on the train right out a long way to Burnt Oak . . ."

"Both of them?" Vort said, drawling the words.

"Oh, yes, of course, both of them. And into a little house with the blinds down. . . ."

Vort spun around. "What?"

Lettie laughed. She was manicuring her untidy fingernails. She looked up at Vort's tall, taut figure. He frowned down at her and flicked a hand at her.

"Be quiet!" he said.

"All the blinds down?" he said, to the swarthy little man who sat on a kitchen chair beside the table, with his fat thighs wide apart.

"All in the front. I don't see the backs."

"Vort," Lettie said, energetically filing her nails, and not looking up, "in this country, people sometimes draw the blinds when they're bereaved. Or if the sunlight is very strong."

"Yes," said the swarthy man, "blinds down. Big bunches of flowers coming. Lot of people in and out."

He stabbed at his own chest with a thick thumb.

"Me too," he said. "I knock on the door. See what's cookin'."

Vort smiled. He sat down languidly and crossed his legs.

"Very good! A nice bunch, Andrew . . ."

Andrew shook his big, dark head. "No. I had no flowers. Just to say deepest regrets. Had heard all about it and was very sorry. Young woman says thank you. How did it happen, miss? A pure accident. My mother was halfway across the road and this car skidded to avoid some children. . . ."

Vort was not listening any longer. He was watching Lettie whose head was bent over her small, grimy hands with which she was so engrossed. His face had an austere, rapt expression; but presently, while Andrew was still relating his day's work, he turned his head an inch or two, and catching Andrew's somber glance, he smiled, winked, and jerked his head towards Lettie with a slight, almost imperceptible movement. Andrew grinned. It was a little secret between them. Their knowledge of her identity, and their certainty of the fact that she did not suspect it.

". . . and so I found that this woman whose mother has the pure accident is the servant in the flat where Eva is. And has a week's leave."

He paused to draw breath.

"What else did they do?" Vort said, languidly.



"Then back in the subway train to Hampstead. Nice lunch. And after that they go for more shopping. For furs. A big shop."

"A sale? Was there a sale in this place?" Vort said.

"No."

"People have their furs renovated in the summer," Lettie said. "And if they have costly ones, they like them kept in store, where they're properly looked after."

"You have experience of the fur trade?" Vort said.

"I read that in a glossy somewhere," Lettie said.

"Glossy?" Andrew said, tugging a dirty little notebook from his vest pocket. It was indexed. He rested it on the deal table and wrote under "G," with a tiny pencil.

"A periodical of some size, printed on glossy paper, and usually published monthly," Lettie said.

Andrew breathed loudly while he wrote.

"Go on," Vort said, pensively.

"For one hour twenty minutes at this shop . . ."

"She must have some beauties!" Lettie said. "Minks, and Persian lamb, and . . . but don't let me interrupt."

"And then back by the subway to Leicester Square, change to the Piccadilly Line and as far as Green Park. Home. And that is all."

"Quite a day," Lettie murmured, polishing her nails with a chamois.

Andrew sighed quickly. He had served in three armies in the last war. First the French army, then in the German army, and lastly in the Russian. Always in the infantry, marching, marching. Now he had the old soldier's trouble: bad feet.

"Too much walking, Lettie," he said.

Vort was grinning. "Tomorrow, they will go to the Festival Exhibition."

Lettie looked up. Andrew's face was full of dismay.

"Such a heat!" he grumbled softly. "My feet . . ."

"I'm the same," Lettie said. "Don't worry. I'll give you something for them. Look . . ."

She took a packeted powder from her handbag and gave it to him.

"You empty the powder, all of it, into a gallon of warm water and soak your feet in it for ten minutes."

His broad, greasy face brightened. He nodded.

"Good girl, good girl!"

And with the packet in his hands he got up. Vort lifted a hand to detain him.

"Did you go into the fur shop?"

Andrew shook his head. "No. Stayed in a bookshop not far away, and had some tea in a milk bar."

Vort let him go. When the door closed, he put his feet on Andrew's chair and tilted his own chair back, swaying to and fro. Lettie went on with her manicuring.

"You ought to look after them," she said, without glancing at Vort. "Get them things like that. For their feet."

"Like a good sergeant," he said, cynically. He added, "He is an old thing, a proper old soldier."

She laughed quickly. "I suppose they're all the same, no matter what army they're in. Are they?"

That set him talking. He liked to idle through his reminiscences. The time when he had served in Poland, then in Holland, then France, Norway, Italy. A member of the Gestapo. She had heard it all before and, like a lurid little thread running through it, she had heard his vanity in his boasts. He always said two things: the Norwegians—very clever, very strong. And: to this day, Bormann has not been found.

She continued to polish her nails. She thought about Andrew and wondered what was his real nationality and

from whence he had come. Spain, Portugal, Italy? He could just as likely be a Corsican, or from the Levant. It was very important for her to know, because although he was well trained and reliable, with great layers of knowledge and loyalties superimposed upon him, inside his nature there were abiding characteristics of race, tribe, family. He had been swept into so many currents by the lurch of warfare. From a waiter's job in Paris, in 1939, into the French army; into a P.O.W. camp in Germany; into the German army; into Russia where he had deserted to the Russian army and become a soldier in an international battalion which had at last entered Berlin, where he had then inscribed his name on a broken column in the shattered Reichstag.

A name on a broken column covered with hundreds of other names. It was symbolic of countless thousands, of entire nations, of a whole generation. Names on a broken column. Last night, when she had put the question to the Colonel, he had looked more at the immediate task than at the total struggle. If she had felt that there was only this—the game against Vort—now and in the future, she would have resigned six months ago and taken a job in any office where, at least, something fundamental was pursued. Trade, the good will, the bonds between manufacturers and customers. But there really was more to her job than rooting out the Vorts, the Nobs, the Andrews, and their accomplices, and capturing the Eva Droumeks. They represented a cynical ideology which oozed from the East and which had to be checked, not by warfare but by the re-creation, resurgence, and stimulus of fundamental decencies, truth, justice. That was the real struggle now. To get back to decency, and honesty, and set the world firmly on it.

It was one way of defeating Vort. He was a clever or-

ganizer. If he had had anybody else but her working with him as expertly as she pretended to work for him, he would long ago have gained sufficient information to put Droumek on a course towards Fawley. His one fault was that he trusted her.

But he was becoming suspicious. He was beginning to sense not so much the bad luck, the tiny failures of his own and her efforts when they went after Fawley, but the hidden human element that appeared to oppose them. Vort was so experienced. Unlike Andrew and the others, he had not only been trained twice—once by the Gestapo, and then by the Soviet people—but he had had years of deadly experience. He knew that he could trust his suspicions when they were aroused, as they now were.

And Vort, aroused, had drawn Andrew, Nobs and the others closely around him. Closer than ever. He knew where all of them were—herself included—all the time. They were more than his assistants now. They were his senses, his cunning, his devilish mind. And he took good care of them, not with foot powders but with rewards that satisfied their wretched, personal ambitions: money for one; authority for another; security for the next one. Even Andrew—hapless, perspiring, paunchy little Andrew, symbolical of the millions of displaced persons—had been promoted, allowed to feel that he was coming to the surface of the wave. She had no doubt of it. The suspicions which Vort had were conveyed to him, and they flattered him. But they did not quite quench something in him which expressed itself in his aspiration to acquire a perfect command of English. Deeper than his loyalty to Vort, there was a hope, a dream, and ambition. A restaurant or café or bar, of his own. Or an hotel. Something like that.

It was buried amid his latent decency and his instinc-

tive respect for basic laws. She longed to revive it in him. He mattered because there was that much in him waiting for its chance. Vort, when the end came, would be defeated only in his futile philosophy. He would see her treachery to them only as cunning that had surpassed his. But Andrew would never forget it. To him, it would be the betrayal of fundamental trust. He would never realize the larger issues, the conflict of values, unless she could get to him and leave him with something for the bit of decency in him.

She wondered how strong was that underlying faith of his. Was it a candle flame that would expire in the current of air, or a glowing ember that would burst into flame in that same current?

But time was running short. She could not hope for much more luck, or much more success. Vort suspected her. He had no proof. He was watching her. He hung around her. He encompassed her with his sudden, alternating moods that were intended to rush her defenses and shake loose an unwary word or glance. His presence was a constant pressure. His patience was alarming because it expressed his certainty of her defeat. She could no longer relax upon the fact of her success, or accept even the moments such as the present ones when he chattered to her about himself. Everything now was charged with significance and purpose. And he had the advantage of his long experience of ruthless authority as an officer of the Gestapo. She remembered the stories he had told her. Vort, intent upon preserving and insisting an ideal. That Spirit must dominate, not Matter. That what Nietzsche intended . . . That Hitler was a lout, after all, who had interpreted the Ideal wrongly, and by making war on Poland taking that Ideal into the realm of Matter, whereas it belonged to Spirit. Vort, declaring that



when he argued with his victims he always begged them to yield for the sake of humanity which, just before the Renaissance, had taken the wrong road and thrown away the progress into Spirit and turned to Matter, to science, to art that no longer found its inspiration in Spirit.

But lately he had become humble. And even now, while she manicured her fingernails, he said it again: that he had finally renounced violence because it was not a felicitous instrument; that warfare was rejected by his new masters because it was too costly, too outmoded, too final; and that the new kind of warfare was a great art even in its present infancy of psychological-propagandist ethical manipulation.

Suddenly, he was silent. He had come to an end. She remembered what the Colonel had said:

"Oh, psychology . . . I remember when the first translations of Jung and Freud appeared in England. Very popular. One's friends read half a chapter, and began to discover all one's secret motives. The bogus intellectuals were carried away by it. The new ones are worse. They haven't read even half a chapter of Jung or Freud. They just use the jargon. But there—once there were sorcerers, then witches, and next alchemists. And now it is psychology, to turn base characters into golden ones. And every conceited half-wit is an amateur psychologist. Like Vort!"

She glanced up at Vort. He was sitting with his hands in his pockets and his feet on the rung of the chair before him. She went on manicuring her fingernails. He took his feet from the chair and swung slowly round and rested his arms on the table.

He idly fingered one of the little implements she was using. He yawned. Up here, in this little, bare room under the roof, the air was very warm after the hot sum-

mer day. He dropped the file and took up the cuticle cutter.

"Like a little scimitar," he said, smiling, brandishing it with childish flourishes, making a thrust at her with it that brought his long, lean hand to within an inch of her breast. He was in a playful mood. She flicked his hand away.

"Stop that, Vort," she mumbled.

He laughed tersely, and got up to prowl restlessly and aimlessly about the room. She knew that it wasn't a physical restlessness. It was in his mind. He was pinned down, hemmed in by his inability to acquire more information about Fawley. And he knew that someone was deliberately obstructing him. He had posted Nobs outside the flat where Eva was staying, and told him to get inside if he could.

"Sell something. Some insurance. Something. Think of something, and call on the woman."

Not long ago, Nobs had telephoned to report that they were going to the theater. That was all. It wasn't enough for Vort.

He was at the window.

"Let in some air, Vort, will you?" Lettie said. "It's hellish hot in here."

He paid no heed to her request but came strolling back to her, lost in thought, fingering the little cutter. Standing behind her, he encircled her neck with the fingers of his left hand, quite tightly, and put the cutter against her throat. He snuffled with laughter.

"I will let in some air," he said.

It was one of his larking moods. She stopped working at her nails and tapped his fingers which were on her neck.

"That's enough. The window, I said."

He giggled. Like a playful schoolboy. He was often in such moods, but never as demonstrative as this to her. He sometimes ruffled her hair, pulled her ear. It was as near as he ever got to a caress. It was with Andrew that he really larked. The two of them wrestling, laughing, playfully fighting each other around the room, across the beds, on the floor, their laughter resounding while she looked on. But this—with his fingers tightening their grip. She gave him a sharp nudge with her elbow.

He let go of her at once, drawing back with a loud intake of breath. She glanced around at him, laughing, and met his glowering stare. His left hand was traversing his abdomen. Malice flushed his features.

In that mood, he was fit for anything. She got up. Better, she thought, to be on one's feet. . . .

"I'm sorry . . ." But she was laughing. "Was it below the belt? I didn't mean . . ."

The door opened and Andrew came in. Vort was grinning at her, ripe for mischief. He tossed the little cutter to the table and rubbed his hands together.

"Didn't mean, eh? Andrew!" he said, still looking at her. "Watch me! I am going to get her for hitting below the belt."

Andrew was silent. He wasn't laughing. His hands came from his pockets, and his arms hung. He was a picture of hesitation. But Vort . . . Vort had an unmistakable earnestness beneath his grin, his sportive manner, his rising hands.

She darted backwards, around the table.

"All right. Come on! But look out for yourself, Vort."

She was laughing. She was simulating his earnestness, grinning as he was, taking his attitudes. She let him come on. She skipped, shrieking, out of his grasp. Darting into a corner, panting, giggling with him, she waited for him

with a clumsy defense. She was conscious of Andrew watching solemnly, almost with apprehension, certainly with doubts. But Vort was violent, and vicious.

His right arm shot out to grab her. And at once, she was at him, lithe and deft and sure of herself. He hadn't a chance against her. For all his size and lean strength, he was off his feet, his body thrown as neatly as her instructor could have wished. The thud of his sprawled form rattled everything in the room. Andrew grunted in amazement.

She was laughing loudly, standing over Vort. In the next instant, he was on his feet, a towering, outraged animal, disheveled, dazed, lost in humiliation, surprise, and the tempest of his anger.

"I warned you, didn't I?" she exclaimed.

But he was at her with his arms thrashing down upon her laughter and her limbs. The breath was crushed out of her. She struggled, panting. She lashed out. She tried to laugh, for that was necessary. Only her laughter could hold the attack and render it in those terms. He was fighting her with all his strength. At last, she was still. Then he crowed with triumph.

"Ah! Now then! Now! You see . . ."

He was in earnest. She couldn't fail to see that. He no longer troubled to conceal it. His suspicions had burst through caution, on a tide of anger and hatred. He was set on revenge.

"Now, you little snake! Now we shall see!"

He was dragging her towards the nearest wooden chair.

"Get the rope," he said to Andrew.

She laughed. She made mock protests and giggled at them. And panted. She was determined not to let him know that she realized his earnestness. Fear—she was swallowed in it, from his frenzied embrace. But he must

not know that. She had to show him that she trusted him, that she believed it was horseplay, a lark, a rough and tumble, and that the other—the real thing—could never happen between them. It was fun, something to laugh about.

“You wait, Vort! I’ll get you for this!”

She struggled as she laughed. She kicked another chair over, in Andrew’s path, as he came back with the rope.

“My father, the sheriff, will swing you for this, you two! He’s on his way, with his men!”

And while they were trussing her to the chair, she saw Vort laughing silently. He burst into a thin cackle. She knew that he was hesitating. He couldn’t come so far, and show his hand, without an alibi. He was out of himself, roping her, but the part of himself which trusted her was becoming intact again. It would be his alibi. He would say he was only larking. But if, for an instant, she lost her nerve, let fall a word, he would—it would be the violence, the end of her, the failure of the Colonel’s plans, the defeat of decency by all the things behind the grinning, evil face that beamed upon the enslaved millions.

She played her part, as Vort did. She deceived him, as she had always done. She cried out that the ropes hurt her legs and arms, that she was not really the sheriff’s daughter and would tell all. She went through the whole performance, while Vort struck a match and said, “Now, then! You see . . .”

“Stop! I give up!”

“What will you give up, Lettie?”

“All my sweet coupons for this period.”

They laughed, both of them. Andrew was silent, behind her. Vort brought the flame to within an inch of her chin. She jerked her head and blew it out. And shrieked with laughter, while he struck another.



"Lettie! Where does Chris Fawley stay, when he comes to town?" Vort said.

She shook her head. "Only a match? Oh, Vort, make it a red-hot poker."

"A match will do," he said. "Now, answer!"

"Oh, I couldn't," she said, solemnly. "You're too young. It's not a nice place, at all. I daren't tell you."

And while both of them spluttered with laughter, he leaned down and held the match to her bare forearm, saying, in that fierce instant of consuming pain and ultimate conflict: "Where?"

And waiting, with his vehemence and venom and violence brought to that climax, he saw only the look of terrible indignation that defeated him and even threatened him with something worse than fire.

"Vort!" she shouted. "That's enough of this tomfoolery!"

He crushed the match hard against her skin and flung away, laughing.

"Stop this nonsense! You two! I've got work to do, if you haven't. I've got all those lists to type out."

He slipped the rope's knot, grinning like a schoolboy caught in mischief.

"It was only a joke."

"Joke!"

She tore the rope's bonds from her, and kicked the chair away. She thrust her arm towards him.

"Joke! Funny sort of joke! That hurt, Vort. Look at it!"

She was dizzy with pain. But he heard and saw only her anger.

"Only a little bit of fun."

"Fun! Well, I've got work to do."

She hurried out, down the stairs, into the office. At the desk, she inserted a sheet of paper in the typewriter, and began to type the orders which Vort, Andrew, Nobs, and the others had taken for the exporters in Germany.

"220 gross toy tommyguns; 100 gross clockwork beetles; 550 gross toy howitzers."

The order books were full. As agents of the firms in Germany, Vort and Andrew traveled to and fro from Hamburg. She smiled. They collected orders in both countries. But lately, of course, they were busy here. Her injured arm throbbed. Her head ached. She didn't wish to look at the wound in case it was worse than she imagined. But the arm was stiffening, and she felt sick and dizzy, and attacked by little rushes of panic. If, for instance, Bertha mentioned Fawley in hearing of Eva Droumek, or if Droumek got a line on Fawley, and the whole thing which she and the Colonel had preserved split wide open for Droumek, Vort, and the others to wade in. One word could do that.

She stopped typing. Why didn't the Colonel act? This ambush which he had prepared—the quarry was nicely placed, and he could spring the trap, shoot, move in now. Before it was too late. Before Vort, Droumek, scented trouble. Before Vort roped her again and put more flames to her skin.

She typed some more orders: "1,500 gross toy guided missiles; 1,000 gross toy strato-bombers with toy atom bomb attachments, and instruction leaflets."

Andrew came plodding down with tea in a pot on a tray for her.

"Something to eat, pretty soon," he said.

"Thanks," he said. "Make it a nice salad. The way you do them."

Then he saw her arm. He looked dumbfounded and contrite. She herself winced when she saw it: the great raw area, and the rest inflamed.

"Pretty bad," he said.

"Oh, just a bit of fun! Only a joke."

Vort strolled in. "Put a bit of sticky paper on it."

He sniffed with laughter and dodged the order book which she threw at him.

"Septic, septic!" Andrew was saying, gravely.

She glared at Vort. "Get out! Go and get something for it from the chemist round the corner."

He went without a word. Andrew poured tea for her.

"I put the stuff on for you. Nice dressing. First aid," he said, picking up the order book. "But just a joke, you know. No badness."

"Some of his jokes, and yours, go a bit too far."

"You mad with me, too?"

She smiled. "Don't be daft! I can take a joke."

Vort returned and put down a packet of tannic acid jelly, lint, and bandages. He patted her shoulder. His lips twitched. He was on the verge of laughter, and he had not yet apologized. And never would.

He went up to his room, and it was Andrew who prepared everything for the dressing. Some boiling water in a little basin into which he had dropped two or three simple first-aid instruments; towels. And, for once, his fat hands were scrupulously clean.

"Professional," she said.

He drew up a chair. "Plenty. First aid in a lot of places."

The entire wound was blistered. She looked away while he drained them.

"No typing orders now. Better rest," he said.

He had skill, and a good touch.

"I've got hundreds of orders," she said. "They'll have to be listed and posted."

"Can wait," he mumbled.

"You know they can't. It's business. It's a big thing."

He paused in his work when she said that; and looking intently at her, he nodded.

"Pretty good. Could be . . ."

He made a circular motion with one hand.

"Extended," she said. "Worked up to something bigger still. If you could give more time to it. It would be easy."

He nodded. Then he chuckled. "Every kid . . . all over the world, with a toy gun, toy tank! Millions!"

"Why not? Better than the real thing. But other toys, too. Sensible ones. And glassware . . ."

His eagerness bloomed in him. She had reached him at last. Vort came hurrying down and left the house. Andrew tied the bandage on her arm.

"He's gone to the theater," he mumbled. Then he looked up at her, saying: "Big, nice business. With office and plenty order books. Office in London. In Hamburg, Paris, Rome. When . . . when this business is finished."

It was a beginning. "Why not?" she said, cautiously.

## 20

It was not until they were inside the shop that Edna said to Eva, "You remember Bertha Grigg . . . last night? This is her shop."

It was a respite after the trudging journeys, the hot subway, and that tedious tour of the shops followed by the little house with its hush of bereavement. Eva was grateful. She followed the clerk along carpeted passages, up stairs, along a corridor, and into the large quiet room where the big woman—dressed in a plain suit—sat at her desk.

"My dear! How nice!" Bertha said. And then, with a slight change of tone, "Miss Droumek, now you are here, I particularly want you to see . . ."

She touched a bell on her desk.

"Do sit down, both of you. I've got a treat for you, Miss Droumek. I'm going to ask my buyer to show you some rather lovely things which arrived yesterday. But now tell me . . ."

She turned to the typist who had answered her summons.

"Eileen, ask Miss Perry to come up, if she's free, will you?"

And when the typist had gone, she spoke to Eva.

"I want you to see some new designs. They'll be worn next autumn and winter, of course. And for our weather, which I expect isn't as severe as yours."

She opened a drawer of her desk and took out some illustrations.

"These are for the trade," she said, handing them to Edna and Eva. "Miss Perry will show you what she selected."

The door opened.

"Come in, Frances. I want you to meet Miss Droumek."

Frances was a fragile-looking woman of thirty, small and fair, with her hair worked into a curious style as



though, Eva thought, she were about to take a bath. She wore a dark green dress with a small gold brooch.

"Good afternoon, Miss Droumek!"

And that was all. No surprise at sight of this visitor. A brief smile from a pretty face. And then a glance from her pale eyes. A woman of poise and experience, not to be taken by surprise.

"If you have a few minutes, Frances," Bertha said, "I should like you to show Miss Droumek some of the new models. Particularly the ones which arrived yesterday. Those you showed me, for instance."

She added, "Just as a matter of interest."

"Oh, I see. Yes, very well. They're not all ready, but there is quite a selection."

The four of them went out. At the end of the passage, Bertha said, "Frances, you and Miss Droumek go on. We'll see Mrs. Hill for a few minutes and join you afterwards."

And when Eva had disappeared with the buyer in the direction of the department, Bertha led Edna to one of the fitting rooms. She pushed open the door.

"In here . . ."

And when the door was closed and Edna was seated, she took the chair opposite her.

"Well?"

Edna glanced slowly about her. "Docile, and quite amiable. We spent an hour and a half in the shops, and then I took her with me to Mary's home at Burnt Oak, and back here for lunch."

"And last night, after I left you?"

"Just like any other visitor from abroad. That's the thing: she falls back on that act. The refugee from behind the Iron Curtain."

"So, all quite pleasant? Nothing said?"

Edna smiled reflectively. "Yes. We talked about clothes, domestic things. Soap flakes, washing powders . . ."

"Makes the whole world kin," Bertha said.

"She tried several times to convince herself that some nonsense and lies which she had been told were true. She stood there—in the kitchen, helping me wash the dinner things—stood there and told me that things advertised for sale and in shop windows were not for sale at all. That they were like motor cars, for export only. And only the rich and privileged were permitted to buy. The rest had to take Utility. I told her that she really hadn't had much of a life. I said she'd see for herself, when we went to the shops."

"So she was quite frank . . ."

"Yes, but as though to say surely what she had been told must be true. Imagine it, Bertha! An intelligent woman, believing such rubbish! A grown woman, educated and experienced, and yet believing . . ."

"My dear, it is not her fault. Blame the liars who spread such rubbish. And as for the educated, experienced mind, there are plenty of those in this country, professing Communism, and seeing only good in a system which distorts truth. What did she say when she saw for herself?"

"She was quite nonplussed. Not a word from her."

There was silence for several seconds.

"There's no doubt, is there, that she realizes that you know what she is?" Bertha said, at last.

"She must know that I think she is bogus."

"And that's all?"

"The rest is mere speculation. I hate to think of it. I've gone as far as I dared to, with Charles. I loathe scenes, Bertha. And—even the little I did say to Charles

only seemed to drive him to wretched shifts. He tried to warn me that she was—oh, a spy, that she might be a spy—but he said it only to cover himself. It's all so beastly. I suppose she is something of the sort. Like those women in that Canadian spy business. The whole thing worries me horribly when I think about it. I'm worried about Charles, and myself . . ."

"What do you propose to do if she gets permission to remain in the country?" Bertha said.

Edna shook her head. "I simply don't know. I can't inform against her, because of Charles. I simply dare not think about it. I just can't look ahead."

"We had better try to."

"If she gets permission, I'll be glad to see the last of her," Edna said. "I shall feel that if the responsible authorities have passed her, then she can't be what I think she is. . . ."

"And what she has practically admitted to being," Bertha said. "And what Charles has tacitly confessed . . ."

"Don't speak of it, please!"

"It has to be considered. If she is allowed to remain, you cannot let her walk off and continue whatever she came to do. If she's arrested later on, inquiries will lead back to Charles and you."

Edna covered her face with her hands.

"It's all my fault, entirely my fault. I never protested when I knew that Charles was becoming involved in all these things. I let him . . ."

"That's not the point, dear," Bertha interrupted. "It solves nothing to follow that route. Let's consider what to do with her if she's allowed to stay in the country."

"She can leave my home, at once!" Edna said, vehemently, taking her hands from her face. "If they give her permission, they are responsible . . ."

"No, my dear, we are responsible, because we know more about her than they do. We ought to give them certain information now. Well, we can't, for obvious reasons. Very well. Since we don't, we must solve the problem ourselves, properly."

"Bertha, even the prospect of having her with me this evening, at the theater tonight, tomorrow, the next day, and for perhaps another week, is unbearable. I simply could not endure her company longer than that. She's agreeable. We have plenty to talk about that eludes the dilemma that fills the air in the flat. I've always trusted time to solve some problems. But it only increases this one. And with Charles there . . . Oh, it's like something tangible, in the air. I want her out of my life. I can't leave her staying with us."

"You needn't," Bertha said.

"But what else . . . You have just said . . ."

"She can share my flat with me," Bertha said.

"That's preposterous!"

Bertha smiled. "She can't refuse," she said, calmly and confidently. "Permission or no permission, she understands perfectly that you and I have seen through her. She'll be glad to come."

"She knows very well that I can't have her arrested because I have to consider Charles' position."

"None of us wishes to denounce her like that," Bertha said, with superb suavity. "The point is that she'll have to earn a living. It would be a tactical mistake to let her think that we haven't the courage to hand her over to the police. But it won't be a mistake to offer her a home and a job. She can come to work here. I can give her a good job. And she'll be glad to have it."

"You couldn't do it, Bertha."

"It can be done easily."

"But there is Chris Fawley . . ."

"He comes once in a blue moon. She can have his room. I can always rig up the camp bed for him, in the dining room."

"It's not that. I am thinking of his work. Of course, she'll be glad to be with you, since it means being near him!"

"I wondered if you would realize that," Bertha said.

"And you are quite prepared . . ."

Bertha laughed at the aghast look. "I've told you: Chris comes once in a blue moon. He might turn up the next week-end, or not until three or four months later. And you needn't worry that she'll dig anything from him about his work. I'm a good friend of his, but I know nothing at all about his work, and less still about his movements. It's hardly likely that he'd be more communicative to a stranger."

"I don't know," Edna said, dubiously, "I really don't know what to say."

Bertha rose. "I think you might at least commend me for my charity."

"Charity!"

"Did you think it was malice? It'll determine into charity. And after what you've just told me about her, I should say that charity is what she needs most of all."

Edna grimaced wistfully. "It's like a conspiracy."

"I suppose it is," Bertha conceded.

"And it's a terrible risk, too."

Bertha smiled. "Everything is a risk, nowadays. But we'll discuss all this again, between now and the end of the week."

"Well, if you say so . . ."

"I can't see any other way out of the difficulty, except this. Can you?"



Edna shook her head.

"Well, that's that, then," Bertha said. "Now let's go and find her."

She opened the door. "By the way, you remember Lettie? She has moved to a new flat and wants to furnish it nicely. She asked me if you would advise her."

"Next week. Would that do?"

Bertha nodded. "But why next week? Why not this?" She lowered her voice as they entered the passage.

"You don't need to sit on this volcano, you know," she said, "putting off things until next week. However, if you wish . . ."

## 21

After the visit to the shop, the return to the flat. Then the plans for the evening. And over a hasty cup of tea, the question, "I have the tickets, but if you prefer something else, we can go."

"Oh, no, thank you. I wish to see these four colonels."

"I'm afraid I can't tell you what it's about. Perhaps you've heard of it."

"No."

"It's amusing, I believe."

But Eva, if she was amused, showed no signs of it. Throughout the play, she sat erect, stolid, silent, staring straight in front of her, like stone. She smoked a cigarette during one intermission. She had coffee with Edna during another. Obviously preoccupied, she said yes when

an affirmative was expected, and no when a negative was best. And only towards the end of the play, when a ripple of laughter ran through the audience, and rose again, and subsided to silence, did she express her feelings. With laughter already threatening on her lips, she turned to Edna.

"This play is so funny!" she exclaimed.

The words seemed to soar into the hushed auditorium, like a fizzing squib which, striking the ceiling, exploded. Too late, Edna unconsciously extended her hand. The words were audible throughout the house. Edna noticed the heads turning, the smiles beginning, the indrawn breath making the atmosphere tense. Next instant, Eva's shrill laughter ripped the hush and poured through, emitting a peal of vibrating, reckless hilarity that jerked the audience all ways. The concerted shout of laughter that met it and drowned it was aimed at her. She seemed unconscious of it. She was once more erect, impassive as stone, outstaring the stares, waiting for the players to resume.

It was Edna who was discomfited. The deluge rebounded from Eva's granite shape to her. She crumpled under it. It was everything, for an instant: maddening, humiliating, a joy. She had an immoderate impulse to kick that stolid presence beside her, to take her out, to give way to a fit of giggling. But the curtain fell on the last act. And soon the lights shone. And it was she, not the curiously self-effaced Eva, who took the inquisitive, half-reproving, half-amused showers of glances. They were like flocks of arrows that pricked her.

She bent her head under them and hurried out into the lobby, longing for Charles, for a glimpse of him coming through the press to shield her with his large shape. But no sight of him; and still the glances falling upon

her, until, suddenly losing her nerve, she quickly asked Eva to remain where she was while she went to the side-door to look for Charles.

She hurried away, almost back to the auditorium, giving the audience time to pass from the lobby. She was absent for no longer than three minutes.

It gave Vort the opportunity which he had sought. He had luck. In all his finery, he had sauntered at a distance behind them. He was beside Eva almost as soon as Edna left her. And there, on the edge of the press, so confident of himself, he spoke to her in her own language.

"Vort is my name. You have been expecting word from me?"

He added a password, which she answered with a nod of recognition.

"But not as soon as this," she said. "All the same, I am glad."

"I have arranged accommodation for you at an hotel, when you leave the flat. Memorize it, please."

He recited it clearly. She was silent for a moment. Then she gave him an animated glance. The two of them could have been friends in conversation.

"And something more," he said. "The telephone number. But first of all: is everything satisfactory?"

It was a question which her pride received first. To have told him the truth would have conveyed only the defeat, the failure of her mission. Even his presence could not mitigate that fact. She could recognize defeat when she saw it. But pride interposed itself between this man and her failure.

"Everything," she said.

"Then why is your host upset?"

She smiled again. "All is well. In future, don't repeat this sort of encounter. Give me information about a cer-

tain man. And wait . . . Wait, understand?—for a telephone call from me.”

“Good. This shop you visited this afternoon?”

Her slow glances went from right to left. Amid the last of the audience, she saw the fair head in the distance, the pale dress.

“Quickly! The telephone number! No . . . quickly! Turn your back on me, and then move away.”

He did as she bade him. And he had gone only a pace or two when Edna reached her. Charles was ascending the steps. He paused when he saw them. Then the three of them passed from the theater and out to Charles' car. And thus back to the pressure, the bleak and persistent reality of a situation which none of them could resolve, which all of them comprehended individually and collectively, which all three found intolerable, but which they could not escape. It was real and yet unreal. For all three of them it was, in itself, safety and yet peril. It consumed patience, but yielded nothing in return. They poured upon it all that they could muster of tact, amiability, charity. They longed for the simplest of respites. But the thing remained, implacable, unrelenting.

Charles could only yawn a little when they reached home, sigh, suggest a drink, and relax in the chair with a glass in his hand, the radio softly playing, while all three of them appeared to be listening.

At last, he rose and put aside his glass. The three of them separated, Eva going to her room, Edna to the large bedroom, Charles to his study.

To look up something, he had told Edna. To look into this day's hours, to peer towards tomorrow, the following day. He had always been stimulated by such glances. Now he was rebuffed by them.

He saw nothing except the lounging, insolent little

man—one of the messengers—who had strolled into his room just before he had left the building this evening.

"You never showed up at the party meetin', las' night, comrade."

The little eyes shot a reproof at him.

"'ave to do better than that, comrade. Must 'old together."

A week ago, it would have seemed a virtue in the dull soul. Now it was a ludicrous impertinence, part of a gross farce whose theme was the world turned upside down.

The comrade lit a cigarette end and exhaled a noxious little cloud of smoke. And still exhaling while he spoke, he rested his hands on the desk and leaned forward.

"Don't want no desertions, comrade, do we? See what I mean?"

He straightened himself, tickled ash from the cigarette butt, and so obviously struggled to maintain the delusion against the reality of duty and the innate wisp of feudalism and Puritanism in him.

"We expect an example from you, comrade. Marx said, and so did Lenin, and Stalin in all 'is speeches says the same—unity and discipline."

It was pitiable and farcical. A delusion. He gave out his fatuous little phrases, like a schoolboy in a school play. He drifted away on them, his self-deception precarious without them.

Expect an example from you, comrade. Unity . . . Charles had listened with revulsion. His own faith could offer as an example only his own ambition which he had now rejected. He had nothing to give to unity. From the first word, he had served his own ends, seeing first of all a chance for himself in what they had said was inevitable and imminent, and finding so soon a means. But now, checked by Edna, compelled to halt, to reflect, to ac-



knowledge facts, he was frantically struggling to discard ambition, the means, the garments of party loyalty and discipline.

The comrade had said, finally, tomorrow night, don't forget the party meeting tomorrow night. Professor . . . some professor or other . . . from the comrades in another district . . . coming to give a lecture . . . Josef Stalin in his Speeches.

Charles would not be present. He was fighting to regain some sort of equilibrium, on a slope which tilted all ways and which sent him lurching down the steep decline of his lost integrity. He had nothing to cling to. His faith in himself, in the party, in his remaining scrap of integrity which he had never cherished, in his popularity, his success, was gone. Even to hope for safety exacted an effort from him.

And even the dregs of hope which he had preserved were bitter when, on the Saturday morning of that week, he handed Eva the franked, official envelope at breakfast, and waited with Edna in the most acute suspense while, with a tardiness and complacency which infuriated him, Eva put down her cup, looked at the envelope, and opened it.

She glanced up at Edna and then at him. She herself seemed unable to believe what she said.

"I have permission to remain in this country. The letter says . . ."

She looked at it. ". . . I am to report once a month to the police in the district . . . where I shall reside."

Without raising her head, she folded the letter and dropped it on her plate and resumed her meal, while he sat opposite her speechless under the voluminous cloud of another, heavier problem.

For of course it was not the end. There was still dan-

ger, still guilt lying on him. At the table, the same silence which had so frequently held all three of them during the week persisted.

He waited a few seconds, then he murmured his excuses and rose. In his study, he stood aimlessly at his desk. The vista of days, weeks, months extended in his imagination. He had huddled anxiously all the week in a constrained vision defined by those few days, vaguely hoping that when the letter came he could rise, breathe, walk, amend so much of his life. But now that he had emerged he saw it: the danger again, extending perhaps only as far as tomorrow, or perhaps as far as months, a year, two years; and in the end, his arrest, disgrace, ruin.

He went back to Edna. ". . . some matters to clear up at the office . . ." And to Eva he said expansively, "I shall see you before you . . ." And there he paused, for the question of her departure and her future residence had not been mentioned. She gave him an inscrutable look.

"Before I leave," she said.

He turned to Edna. "Back about noon, my dear."

He spent the whole morning wandering in the sunlight, in and out of cafés, once into an exhibition of paintings, out again, into Trafalgar Square, on towards the Embankment. When he had come out from the apartment house, he met the beggar with matches. They were old acquaintances now.

"Box o' matches, sir?" And at once, the whisper: "Any news, sir? All well?"

"Excellent," he mumbled.

He tendered two pennies and took the box.

"What does that mean?"

He fed the hunger in that question with a crumb.

"She's staying."

He hurried away. Later, he wondered why he had given that information. To rid himself of the man? To let him free from his bit of anxiety? But who would release him from his anxieties?

## 22

When he had gone, and when there was no possibility of his interrupting them, Edna said, "Have you decided where you are going?"

"I have a room at an hotel."

It did not seem worth-while to ask her where, or to discuss the matter further, for of course she was not going to the hotel. That would be made clear to her at the last moment, when there would be no time for any argument.

"You wish to leave, today?" Edna said.

"This afternoon," Eva replied. She gave the address of the hotel, but Edna made no comment. She piled the breakfast dishes on a tray and took them to the kitchen. That was another thing: Monday, and the return of Mary. And then a resumption of normality.

She supposed that Eva was packing her things. For the first time that week, she did not trouble to make quite sure where Eva was. Vigilance could relax at last. Even the consciousness of Eva's presence in the flat could dwindle to nothing more than a vague fact that would soon belong to the past.

It was during this brief respite which Eva had been

quick to sense that the hope of success had glowed faintly above the wastes of defeat. This withdrawal of vigilance! The pallid personality ceasing to encompass her with its curious emphasis! This sudden sense of expanding space!

With the sounds of the dishes clattering in the kitchen continuing all the time, she went to Charles' study, took up the telephone receiver, dialed a number. Vort's. Quite a resourceful subordinate, Vort. And so was the other, the man with matches. But all of them, from Vort downwards, were disappointing. A year or more had passed, and there were still only the most meager scraps of information about Fawley. If, instead of going to so much trouble to do things for her which she was quite capable of doing for herself, they would only supply her with a detailed picture of Fawley's activities!

Their zealous attentions showed for a moment in a particular light. She recognized the motive behind all that activity which was focused upon her instead of upon Fawley. It was to rescue her from the wreckage of failure.

She realized that they, too, had failed, perhaps because they had been outmatched from the start, or perhaps because they knew what had happened in this flat. For an instant, she had an impulse to replace the receiver and retreat into silence. Defeat was a fact, real and persisting, like the death which she had seen in the face of a young woman during the war. At the height of an air raid, in the first aid station where she sometimes worked as an auxiliary, the surgeon had told her, "Just a glancing, spent bomb splinter, making a mere scratch across her ribs—you can see it, there—and then being deflected by a safety pin to the heart. A safety pin!" And looking at the firm, full face, the strong young body, the vessel so apt for life, one suddenly and passionately believed for a moment that the volume of life was not lost, could be

retrieved, that the pallor of death could so easily be expelled. But one knew, behind that belief, that nothing could be restored to the vessel.

And defeat, too, was final. Nothing could be breathed into it. Nevertheless, although she accepted the fact, she dared not communicate it. Far back, where they waited for news from her, they must not believe, must not know that she had failed.

When Vort spoke, she recognized his voice.

"This afternoon," she said, quickly, speaking in an undertone. "To the hotel. But now tell me. Any news?"

"Soon, very soon. Not at present."

It was all he could say. He was optimistic, but she heard below his words the echo in the void of defeat. She made no comment. Better to let him believe that she trusted him.

"Good. I shall call you again, at some time later in the day. Don't call me. You understand? Don't call me."

She closed the door before she hung up the receiver. Hurrying out, she went to her room and packed her cases, dawdling over them, unwilling to return to Edna who, when she had finished work in the kitchen, went busily about the flat. At about eleven, Eva was called to coffee.

Conversation was desultory. They took coffee quickly. The telephone rang and Edna went to answer it. It did not seem worth-while to Eva to venture furtively after her and try to overhear the conversation. Sitting by the window, it was far more reasonable to ponder the future. What to do this afternoon, tomorrow, the next day, future days, when the whole of this huge city would expand about her, when her money would end and to find food, shelter, would become the prime necessity, the immediate task. But meanwhile, to go on, not hoping that Vort . . . Because, like herself, Vort and the others had failed.



She got up when Edna returned. She helped prepare the cold lunch. She set the table. At half-past one, Charles had not yet returned. She and Edna sat down to the meal. For several minutes, neither of them spoke. At last, Edna began, "You haven't seen this hotel you are going to?"

"Not yet."

"It's not far from here," Edna said, "in a side street."

"You know it?"

There was a considerable pause during which Edna watched her and seemed to reflect upon something.

"I've never stayed there, but I've heard of it," she said. "It is not the sort of place one would choose to go to. In fact, it has a bad reputation."

"I was told that it was comfortable. But, no matter."

Edna wondered who had chosen the hotel for Eva, and in what name accommodation had been booked for her. She supposed that Charles had arranged those matters, before his journey to Sweden, or most likely during the past week.

"Well, we'll see," she murmured.

She was relieved when, shortly afterwards, he came in. He looked extremely pale and tired. Refusing lunch, he sank into a chair. She gave him coffee, and was pleased when he revived. She left him while she went to put on her hat.

"I'll see you to the hotel," she told Eva.

He got up at once. "Oh, of course, you're leaving us, Miss Droumek! Well . . ."

"In a few minutes," Eva said, marching into her room.

When they were ready, he rose again from his chair.

"I'll run you there in the car."

"Thank you," Eva said, "but it is such a short distance, I don't think this is necessary."

"We can walk," Edna said.

He offered his hand to Eva. "Good-bye, Miss Droumek. You'll let us hear from you? You'll come and see us . . ."

She touched the tips of his fingers with her gloved hand, and with a scarcely audible "thank you" turned quickly and went out with Edna. He followed them to the elevator and opened it for them and stood there, saying good-bye, repeating his remarks, making a gesture of farewell, with all the cheerfulness he could muster, until the elevator had disappeared. And minutes after that, he was still there, staring with heavy, empty eyes at the elevator shaft, his hand still slowly waving, until at last motion waned in his hand which slowly sank as his big body seemed to sink into itself.

He turned unsteadily and went back to the room and sat down. When, ten minutes ago, he had entered the building—no sign of the beggar, but the comrade, the messenger, the zealous member of the local party Executive, waylaying him.

"Comrade! Message from the Doctor for you. You're to go and see 'im this afternoon at three. Urgent. Understand? Three, this afternoon."

He was determined not to go. He was finished with the party. But he knew that the party, or at least the Doctor, was not finished with him. It was comparable to the sense of imminent disaster which he experienced when he thought of Eva Droumek proceeding to the hotel, to whatever mission she had come to fulfil. It was something that filled his vision, at all the horizons of thought. The party, the Doctor, encompassing him, never letting go of him.

Long after three o'clock, he looked at his wrist watch. Twenty minutes to four. He wondered where Edna was.

On Friday morning, Senlink was summoned to his chief's office. By this time, he had believed that the subject which he had mentioned to the other, on the previous Tuesday morning, had passed into other hands, and that it was unlikely that he would be informed of whatever developments, if any, ensued.

The chief gave him a sardonic smile and a slip of paper on which an address was written.

"About the subject which you mentioned to me on Tuesday, Mr. Senlink. Will you please memorize that address and the name on the reverse side?"

Senlink read what was written on both sides; and after a brief pause he returned the paper to his chief, who said, "Be good enough to request your friend to visit that person at that address tomorrow morning, between ten and twelve. You are to say that the Colonel is a director of a large concern with trade interests abroad, and that should he feel the necessity for it after discussion with your friend, he will quite likely mention the matter to the proper authority."

And turning to his papers with a detached and preoccupied air, Senlink's chief added indifferently, "The point is not the direct responsibility of this department. You will use discretion when you speak to your friend."

Senlink said thank you and withdrew. He telephoned Pulmer immediately.

"I'm afraid I haven't been able to do anything for you in that matter," he said. "But if you think it will do any

good, I can put you in touch with someone who might be able to help you."

Pulmer was shrewd enough to realize what had happened, and tactful enough not to say so.

"Thank you, Tommy," he said.

"I'll meet you at Paddington, about eleven, tomorrow morning."

Pulmer was waiting for him when he arrived at the appointed time. Senlink explained, "He's a reputable bloke, and I'm told he knows quite a number of V.I.P.'s. Member of the same club. Also, I gather he's a director of several important trading concerns with interests abroad, so he'll probably be able to check the thing for you. Anyway, no harm in having a talk with him."

"Is he expecting me?" Pulmer said.

"Some time between now and twelve."

"I had better hurry."

Senlink gave him the Colonel's name and address.

"Give me a call, one Friday," he added. "Let's have dinner somewhere up here."

Then he watched Pulmer walk briskly out of the station. After that, he returned to his office to complete some work.

The Colonel received Pulmer in a neat little room on the ground floor of the house which Lettie had visited on the previous Monday. Pulmer recognized at once in him the kind of enlightened yet formal officer of high rank who had been a frequent guest at his father's home.

And quite suddenly, Pulmer felt that Herdson had been right when he had suggested that the matter was in the nature of a game between players, for he had the impression that this temperate, active-minded person opposite him was himself one of the players.

"I was told that you had seen Eva Droumek, Mr. Pul-

mer," the Colonel said, crisply but pleasantly, "and that you had a distinct impression that she is not a genuine political refugee. Is that correct?"

"Exactly, sir."

"That is very interesting," the Colonel said. "She seems to have made quite a different impression upon other people. Millions of other people."

"Up to the time she landed in this country, I don't suppose more than two hundred people out of those millions had come face to face with her."

"Oh, but they had seen series of photographs of her, and newsreels of her, and read plenty of detailed accounts of her adventures."

"To see her in actuality is quite another experience," Pulmer said.

"Why?" the Colonel said. Then he qualified the question. "You mean that the impression made by photographs and newsreels of her, and accounts of her adventures, is not similar to the one which she conveys during an actual encounter?"

"That was my experience," Pulmer said. "Quite possibly it was that of other people as well."

"And—what exactly was the substance, let us say, of the difference?" the Colonel said, with lively interest.

"In the photographs and newsreels, there was everything to appeal to the emotional enthusiasm which her story had aroused. Grace, winsomeness, courage beneath the shy smile, sometimes a look of underlying mental anguish beneath an expression of patience. In her actual presence there were all those poses, but underneath them there was a hard, aggressive character, calculating, and unmistakably resolved to pursue its way. A woman who did not match the general impression which she had created, and who did her best to conceal her real character."



The Colonel said, "But it is quite obvious that a woman who had the courage and determination to get out from behind the Iron Curtain isn't a fragile little thing in character. Certainly, she must be hard, calculating, resolved to pursue her course. At the same time, being a woman, she can be feminine. Her woman's nature doesn't preclude—especially in this age—the possession of a strong character."

"Do you disagree with my opinion of her, sir?" Pulmer said.

"I haven't seen her, so I haven't grounds for disagreeing. But I am interested in what you are telling me."

Pulmer grinned. "I was skeptical about her as soon as her story began to bounce in. I'm the reporter on a little newspaper out in the country. Church bazaars, local cricket matches, urban district council meetings, and anything else within reach. I have time to think."

"You are in a unique position," the Colonel murmured.

"The job?"

"In having time to think. Thinking: a good habit which is universally declining. It used to come first. Now it comes last, after action, after talking, after writing. But you were saying . . ."

"I might not have been doubtful about her story, if it hadn't created such enormous excitement," Pulmer said.

The Colonel looked hard at him. "I'm afraid I don't understand the point."

Pulmer said, "If the human race has progressed, and if it has reached a stage of development that is remarkable, it should be capable of realizing in time certain elements and factors that are likely to retard or confuse its existence. Instead of allowing itself to be deceived, enticed, or browbeaten into wretched dilemmas. Why must millions of peaceable people suffer in this century the horrible

rule of Mussolinis, Hitlers, Marxists? Isn't there sufficient wisdom among the millions to prevent ten or twenty worthless and highly dangerous men from taking power? If this is the age of progress and universal enlightenment, why go on behaving like the hapless multitudes under former tyrants? Why wait until everything is boiling before removing the causes of trouble? Why not look into parliaments and discover the men who cannot rule themselves but who are intent upon taking supreme power to rule us? If the smallest concern is looking for a manager, it takes good care to examine the character of an applicant. Isn't it more important, therefore, that men who purpose to manage nations should likewise come under examination before being given even a grain of power? But the parliaments of the world are packed with the worst characters, men whose personal ambitions are as wilfully dangerous as those of the child delinquent. They are there because they have manipulated the emotions of multitudes. It may be an enlightened, informed age, but it hasn't learned to discriminate, and after the assaults on its common sense by Communism, Fascism, and Nazism, it is suffering a deterioration of that common sense. But I'm making a speech at you, sir. I'm sorry."

"No, no, I'm interested. I want to hear what you have to say," the Colonel said. "Please go on."

"I haven't much more to say, except that I think this Eva Droumek is an impostor. In myself, I could never accept her story as being anything but a ruse. It is an attack upon—well, the fundamental common sense of people."

"My company has a great many interests outside this country," the Colonel said. "And yesterday evening, one of our representatives—a most perceptive man—returned

from Czechoslovakia. I asked him what was the reaction there to this business of Eva Droumek. He said that officially there is no printed or broadcast reference to her, but that there is considerable public interest in her escape. She was a teacher of languages, and she was anti-Communist, and quite bold about it. In fact, some of her friends who were anti-Communist frequently warned her to be less articulate about her views."

"And if your representative had been able to trace her past history, say for three or four years, he would find the same evidence to support the idea that she is a confirmed opponent of Communism."

"Doesn't that seem to indicate that she is quite genuine?" the Colonel said.

"Certainly. But looking at the whole thing from the opposite side: every fact which can be produced to support the belief that she is a genuine political refugee who has fled from Communism can also be just as soundly presented to support the contention that she is effecting a ruse. Her story is true on the basis of the facts, but all the facts are all of the ruse."

"I see. What do you think she is? Why this clever subterfuge?"

"I don't know what her purpose is, except that it is to deceive, in the first place. I believe her to be a particularly ardent Communist."

"On the basis of your skepticism?" the Colonel said.

"On the basis of her story. It is a perfect story. It can be checked, as it has been, and proved truthful. And it is also the perfect fabric of a ruse. And when true facts are used like that, to create the substance of an assault on normal credulity, then it has the genuine Communist stamp. But there is another small point, sir. A

man who is a crypto-Communist doesn't concern himself with the comfort of an opponent of Communism. You know to whom I am referring?"

"Yes, your friend mentioned that there was that person dancing attendance upon Eva Droumek at the airport, but of course it would be rash to believe . . ."

"He was pointed out to me by two reputable and trustworthy persons as being . . ."

"I don't disbelieve you, Mr. Pulmer."

"But there it is, sir. No proof. Only my firm belief that the whole thing is a device."

The Colonel nodded. He looked pensively at him, and after a brief silence he said, "Your idea—about the decline in common sense. Pretty grim, isn't it?"

"How else can we account for events in this century?"

The Colonel nodded reflectively. Then he said briskly, "Well, it has been very interesting listening to you, Mr. Pulmer. Thank you for coming. It was extremely good of you."

"Thank you for giving me your time, sir."

They rose and shook hands; and at the door, the Colonel said, "If there is anything which requires doing, I imagine it will be done."

Pulmer thanked him and departed. When he was on his way back to the newspaper office, he grimaced.

"He knew," he thought. "There was no need for me to tell him a thing. Letting me gas . . ."

And when the door had closed upon Pulmer's departing presence, the Colonel had braced himself and smiled.

"An assault upon common sense! If it were just that, I'd think nothing of it. It is more than that. Survival. Unless he meant that the success of the first will result in the collapse of everything."

Then his face clouded and his features became dis-

torted for a few seconds. He swung around with his hands on his hips and looked very young and active.

"That damned monster, Marx!" he exclaimed, furiously.

## 24

The hotel. Nothing more than a tall, slender old family house converted cheaply into a place which gave wanton couples and predatory males the few comforts which they needed. Seldom more than bed and breakfast. In the afternoon sunlight, with the comparative hush of London's Saturday afternoon sleepily touching it, the decayed portico, the sagging steps, and the two faded green tubs flanking them looked more than ever the entrance to habitual vice.

Approaching it, Edna said, "Is the room reserved in your name?"

"For Eva Drew. To avoid publicity."

"You'll have to give your proper name, since you have to give the police your name and address."

"Certainly."

To Edna, the terse remark sounded like an echo of her own revulsion for this place. Ascending the worn steps and passing through the dusty porch, the glass-paneled door rattled behind them like cynical laughter. In a single glance, both of them read the shabby atmosphere, seeing the stained, threadbare strip of carpet



running towards the little hall where the wicker table and the wicker chair stood below the great, gilded frame around a spotted print of somebody's duchess. Light from a grimy window touched the desk and the closed, ink-spattered register. Up the wide stairway the worn fiber matting with its holes matched the dark stain running in a line along the wall. The heat of a bright summer afternoon lay heavily on the air and was interlaced with the odor of frying fat. The whole scene was drowsy and sad with a kind of forlorn ache for its former luster and respectability now buried under an air of clandestine lusts.

A little old porter in a greasy waistcoat glided silently forward, his damp face the murky mirror in which all was vague, his entire presence that of the willing pander.

"Ladies!"

The voice, itself no more than a whisper, promising silence, always silence.

"A room for . . . How many will it be, ladies?"

Edna touched Eva's arm, and without a word they hurried out, into the clean air, the sunlight.

"You couldn't possibly stay there."

"No. But I have no other address," Eva said, halting on the pavement.

At the corner, the inevitable taxi had set down its couple.

"Don't let us wait here. The taxi . . ."

Edna hurried towards it. When they were seated, Edna gave the driver the address.

"Are you sure there will be room in this hotel?" Eva said.

"It isn't a hotel."

And in answer to the look of challenge and interrogation, she added, "You've met my friend Bertha. She has a room to spare . . ."

"I'm sorry, but this must not be. No!"

" . . . in her flat."

"I cannot go there. I must find a room at a hotel."

"With the Festival Exhibition in full swing, you could walk from end to end of London and still not . . ."

"I must try."

"You'll find Bertha's flat very comfortable. And she's an easy person to get along with."

Eva shrugged her shoulders. "I would much prefer to go to a hotel. Your friend might not be pleased to have a visitor."

"She wants somebody to share her flat with her."

"In that case . . . but without first of all asking her and talking this matter with her . . ."

Edna said no more; and presently the expostulations, the half-hearted refusals, the doubts, and the obvious fears of a rebuff from Bertha slowly ended, and there came the first genuine expression of gratitude.

"You have taken so much trouble . . . Thank you. You have been very kind. I am very glad, because that hotel . . ."

And then a shudder of disgust, followed by qualms as to the possibility that Bertha might be out.

"If she is," Edna said, "one of the tenants of the upper flats will let us in."

"Suppose she has gone away for the week-end?"

The taxi stopped outside the house.

"We shall soon know if she has," Edna said.

But when they rang the bell, they heard almost at once a door closing and footsteps, and then a pause followed by the sound of approaching footsteps in the hall.

"She is at home," Eva said.

The door opened and Bertha welcomed them. And in response to the explanations and the request, there was the reasonable assent.

"Of course! The room is there, empty. I have far too much space here. I should be only too glad. It's no trouble whatsoever. Don't think of it. Look, put your cases in it, and come and have some tea. And afterwards you can help me make up the bed."

There wasn't a single hitch, a single flaw in the whole plan. Even the faint flavor of conspiracy which it had held and which had troubled Edna during the week was dispelled by Eva's satisfaction with what she herself plainly realized was comfort and safety. There were other advantages, but of these she said nothing. It was a relief to find herself free at last from the curious, almost abstract, elusive quality of Edna's character which had so oppressed her during the week, and already stimulated by the demonstrative, forthright character and personality of Bertha. Indeed, all that was combative and assertive in Eva's character was immediately released by her proximity to Bertha.

Edna remained for half an hour. She did not fail to notice the change which occurred in Eva during that time. From hesitation to the first flush of relief when Bertha had welcomed her, and from satisfaction to an almost aggressive expression of herself: the stages were very plain to her. It was as if the hard, assertive spirit which had been constrained for six days was again brimming with resolve and resuming its course.

But when she had risen to go, and when Bertha came with her to the door, she was reassured by the calm force, the faint smile on the big, square face of Bertha, and the whispered words.

"You needn't worry, you know. It won't be a picnic for any of us. Least of all for her."

And after a pause, she added, "Take my advice, and spend the week-end at the bungalow. Get Charles right

out of town. You could run down in the car. Do that. I'll phone you on Monday."

Edna hurried away. For the first time in six days, a release from the hard stress of that presence. And a chance to relax the senses, the suspicions, the mistrust. But at the same time, there was the recoil. The mind would not so readily part with its habit of vigilance. It demanded another subject. It seized upon Charles.

It was poignant to see him standing in the passage when she returned. His anxiety visible, and audible.

"I wondered where on earth you were!"

"Bertha's," she said, resting her hand on his arm, while he stood there in that attitude of wretched suspense.

He seemed so aimless, so much in need of moral support. Following her into the room, he brightened.

"You—fixed everything for her at the hotel?"

She sat down on the window seat. "I couldn't let her stay in that filthy little hotel, Charles. So I took her to Bertha's flat. She's going to stay there."

He was aghast. The information seemed to stun him. He was caught on his little flight of recovery. He blinked at her.

"Bertha's! But good God, that's where . . ."

He looked around and sat down slowly, like an invalid.

"That hotel was foul!" she said flatly. "Eva and I took one look when we were inside . . ."

"Yes, but good heavens . . . Didn't you realize that Chris Fawley . . ."

He did not conceal his distress. She looked away.

"I couldn't plough about looking for another hotel," she explained. "And with the Festival visitors, I doubt if there's any accommodation in any hotel."

"But didn't you stop to think? Didn't Bertha realize that . . ."

She laughed at his harassed look, his abject air.

"Charles, don't be absurd! Bertha and I know quite well that she's bogus. . . ."

"Well, then . . ."

"Chris turns up there about once in a blue moon. And I think you can trust Bertha to make quite sure that Eva behaves herself."

He could not prevent himself from being amused by the phrase. The lugubrious smile limped across his face.

"Behaves herself . . ."

But Edna was not smiling. Free of Eva, she had acquired a more positive manner. She was not laughing. She sat with her hat still on her head, her gloves on her hands. Perfectly at ease with him, no longer deceived by him, she said suavely, "Charles, you didn't think that I would be content to let her wander off on her own, to that hotel, and into the blue, did you?"

He had nothing to say. He sat back in his chair and waited for the inevitable recriminations, the reproaches, the whole protracted discussion which, retarded for six days, was gathered in her. He was aware of her rising and approaching him slowly. He glanced up. She did not meet his gaze. She seated herself on the arm of his chair and folded her hands in her lap. For several seconds, she seemed to be pondering a difficult decision. When at last she looked down at his expectant stare, he felt that she was already pitying him for the harsh decision which she had to convey to him.

His pulse quickened. He knew what she had to tell him. That she was leaving him. That she wanted a separation. That she could not go on, now that—after this . . .

Her hand rested gently on his arm. Her troubled eyes regarded him without rancor. He waited in dismay.



"Charles," she said, reproachfully, "why exactly did you take up Communism?"

The incongruous phrase amused him. He smiled nervously. Take up. It was like "behaves herself." It rendered the whole thing to the size of an adolescent prank. It gave it the proportions of a harmless but reckless practical joke that had got out of hand. He wanted to say that to discuss it from that angle would get them nowhere. Take up! And yet that was exactly what he had done. Taken up Communism. Suddenly, the words came to his tongue.

"Taken in," he said, bitterly.

It seemed the same thing to her.

"Why?" she said.

"Look at my job," he said, resting his hand on hers. "For years, I have felt that . . . that it was . . . that I was merely . . . plodding through national and international crises, and not really attaining . . . achieving . . . anything of a durable, a durable result. It all seemed so . . . so unprofitable, so futile and . . . clinging, just clinging on to . . . to a system that simply . . . that was completely decadent and incapable of being applied to progressive thought or the advancement of . . . of nations. It had the effect of obscuring . . . of . . . and corrupting . . . and . . . well, you know the kind of deals I made. And you see, when I studied Marxism and saw for myself the achievements the . . . it really did seem to be the only answer, the natural development of ideals."

She removed her hand from beneath his.

"You said you were 'taken in.' What does that mean?" she said, flatly.

"To be perfectly frank, I believed—after studying Marxism, and reading Lenin's and Stalin's speeches, and studying the definition of Communist economic policies

. . . I felt convinced that it . . . that there was a tremendous new force, a vision made real, a . . . something that offered hope and . . . but of course I realize now that . . . that words . . . words are one thing, and methods . . . methods are another."

"And was this business of Eva Droumek part of the new vision that would offer hope?" she asked, calmly.

"Part of something," he said, lamely. "I was asked by one of the Executive if I would assist. I was not told the purpose of her visit. I supposed that she was coming on secret party business. I never for a moment imagined that it was more than that. It wasn't until . . . this week . . . that I suspected . . ."

"If her business was just that, she could have come without your connivance," she said. "She could have come here with other delegates from abroad on one of their Peace and Friendship rallies."

"It never occurred to me . . ."

She got up. "But she had to come the way she did. Deceitfully. Playing on the credulity of decent people. Exciting sympathy; making use of the fundamental human virtues. It's quite in keeping with the Communist attitude to the rest of the world. Sending their writers and journalists to tell us how peaceful they are. Promoting these heart-rending rallies for peace. God, how we all want peace! How we all want to say yes, yes, we want peace with Russia! But don't we all know that Communism that promotes the peace rallies is promoting murder, assassination, agitation, in half a dozen places? There is a war brewed by Communism in Korea. There is the acknowledged hand of Communism in Malaya, and elsewhere. Didn't you stop to think, Charles? Don't any of the eminent intellectuals who adopt Communism realize its cynicism and falseness?"

He ventured to glance up at her. She had spoken quietly and without anger or rancor or sarcasm; and he wondered if she was as calm as she sounded.

She was smiling wistfully at him, and there were tears of chagrin in her eyes. She turned away to hide them.

"Just think, Charles," she went on, as patiently and gently as before, "how Russia has deliberately prevented peace since the end of the war. It becomes plainer as the months pass. They had the admiration and respect of the whole world when the war ended. Even the bitterest enemies of Communism admired the Soviet leaders and their people for their valor and their endurance. But all that genuine respect and affection which was sufficient to ensure peace between Russia and the rest of us has been deliberately betrayed by the Soviets. They have broken treaties, and purposely made enormous difficulties for peaceful people. They knew, the Soviet Government knew that their own people and the ordinary people all over the world longed for peace. It was the real fruit of victory, and the ordinary people everywhere deserved it. But they still haven't got it. The Soviet leaders don't wish them to have it. Unrest, warfare in Korea, the hideous business in Malaya, that's too useful to Russia, so it has to go on."

He had heard it so often, from many sources. But he had sneered at it because it was—what was it?—capitalist reactionary propaganda. But listening to it now, he heard in the quiet, sincere voice the truth, the simple, undeniable truth, making no propaganda, merely presenting the few facts that disclosed so much.

She had no fine phrases. Her vocabulary was commonplace. But it symbolized the anonymous multitudes who, like herself, discerned the truth as surely as they could distinguish between night and day. They knew instinc-

tively the right and wrong, the good and evil, the truth and the lie.

He rose from the chair. He knew what he must do now: change the whole inner course of his life. More, amend his character. But he had no idea how this could be done. The desire was in him. He was ready to obey it. But how, and in what positive manner, he did not know.

She came to him.

"Charles, let's go down to the bungalow for the week-end," she said.

"Now—this week-end?" he stammered. "I—there are things to be done," he added, wrestling with his thoughts.

"I know. This is one of them. If we left in half an hour's time, we'd be there in time for dinner at the hotel. Come and pack."

For a moment or two, he was too elated to speak.

"I'll go and bring the car around," he said, at last.

But then he hesitated. The Doctor . . . and the party, and the Doctor's summons. He dared not leave without making an excuse. He could telephone and say . . .

"Come along," Edna said, tugging his sleeve.

And when she did that, he could think only of the bungalow down there in the New Forest, the escape from the flat, from town; the week-end in a scene possessed by summer and not by the Doctor, the party, the evil reality of the party line in the various directives: "new members"; "development of grievances by discussions with strikers in industry, with particular attention to transport, food, armament factories"; "efforts to subvert youth organizations"; selection of agitators for training."

It was like trying to escape from a dense undergrowth which had grown around him and entangled him.

They left at a quarter to five. He felt happy. He wanted to say so, to talk, to laugh. It had been easier to do that when he had been regardless of the real drift of his life. Now that he had examined himself for the first time and determined upon a new course, he found it difficult to speak. It occurred to him that even his manner must obey the transformation. He felt a sudden, sharp qualm, wondering if he was really capable of going through with it all: the reformation of so much of himself, in every aspect of himself. Previously, he had hovered between two states, alternating at times between them, never really making a decisive choice of either of them. Now, having committed himself to the virtuous course, he felt ill at ease in it. He was alien to it. It cramped him. He knew as surely as he knew that sunlight was shed by the sun that he was not really capable of persistent virtue. The party—that was where the party had served him. It had given him a means of expression. It had helped him to be one thing, by its fundamental appeal to what was fundamental in him. It had integrated him and given him a sense of wholeness and momentum at last. But its appeal was to evil. It was the living reality of evil, the massing of evil under a great cloud towards which others were attracted: all those who, like himself, had not consciously known themselves, but who found their purpose at last in the party.

But he was determined to escape. That was the first es-



sential. To disentangle himself. The rest would follow. There was no need to fear anything.

It was fear that held him. He was encompassed by fears. There was Eva Droumek to remember, and the possibility of her arrest, his own arrest. But still—the first step: to renounce his membership of the party. He kept reminding himself of that decision and resolve. For miles, through Putney, on towards Guildford, into the evening light of open country, he erected the idea like a shield against the morbid sense of irreparable exclusion from the innate goodness which Edna represented. He glanced at her.

She was there, beside him while he drove. So near to him. And yet remote from him in a different world. The world of truth, goodness. While he . . .

She turned her head and looked at him.

“Were there many other people—with you?” she said.

Because she had never previously questioned him, he wondered suspiciously if Bertha had urged her to seek information. He hesitated to reply. There was so much which he had concealed from Edna; and he realized what an odious weight the full disclosure of it would become to her. But quite suddenly he felt the need of a confidante, a friend.

“Do you mean in the party?” he said.

She was unable to conceal her astonishment. “I didn’t know you had actually joined. A man in your position!”

“The local branch,” he said; and in answer to her questions, he explained everything: the party structure, its methods; the composition of the branch, and its activities.

She was appalled by it. “You, and other heads of departments!”

"Oh, only two or three! And not from my immediate . . ."

"But with the porters and the cleaners!"

"That's the idea," he explained. "It's the same in other groups. In hospitals, for instance. The senior surgeons and the hospital porters, the staff sisters and the newest probationer. No class or professional distinctions in the party."

"But surely some distinction is made between the person of education and intellectual status and the person without . . . without . . . perhaps without common sense, let alone . . ."

He shook his head. "Communism makes no distinction."

"But nature itself endows the genius and makes distinctions between individuals, physically and mentally, and spiritually. Each tree has its distinctive shape."

"All men are born equal," he said.

"What nonsense! They are born with the right to justice, and equal opportunities. But nature itself makes them unequal. That's a prime fact. The other is a fallacy!"

It amused her. She laughed.

"You are like children, pretending in a game! Do all the scientists who are Communists, and people like you who have had a good education, believe that rubbish?" she said.

He was silent. There was so much more upon which cold reason poured a devastating light. In a puzzled tone, she went on, "It's a frenzy of unreason. I can't understand how sane people—how scientists and people of intellect can subscribe to such emotional nonsense which is obviously for the porous minds of the mob."

"I intend to resign," he mumbled.

It was all he could think of during the journey. He was in a hurry to telephone the Doctor and resign. To make it plain that he had washed his hands of the business. He drove faster, until Edna warned him.

"Charles, be careful, please! Why are you hurrying?"

He drove slower, and at once the decision waned in him. He was far from the party. He was safe, out here, with Edna. Tonight: dinner with her, a walk, or tidying the bungalow's garden. And tomorrow: golf, a walk, or a canter. Was there any necessity for him to telephone the Doctor? Why go to the trouble of acquainting him of something which would only incur disapproval, criticism, perhaps malice? Why behave courteously to that man? Better to say nothing.

Thus, to the moment when he and Edna had had dinner at the hotel, he tried to forget those heavy alternations of mood and decision. He could not so easily forget his anxieties regarding Eva Droumek and his own and Edna's future fate. And for a little while he lost all relish for the week-end down here, and regretted having come so far from a scene which he now felt he should have watched with particular alertness, instead of turning away. For here, without news, with no telephone, how was he to know that at this moment, while he sat at dinner, all that he anticipated—the arrests, the rising scandal and disgrace—might not be in motion?

He tried not to ponder it. He spoke of his plans for the bungalow. That corner of ground beyond the garden: it might be possible to purchase that, and have it laid out in tennis courts. And the garden . . . Make something more of it.

At last, they rose to go.

"We'll nip back to the bungalow in the car, and then walk somewhere. Might see if the Farrs are down."

There were two public telephones in the hall, and both were empty.

"I've just remembered . . ." he told Edna, when they were in the car, "a phone call which I should have made before we left town."

He got out. "Five minutes, at most."

"Charles!"

He turned and leaned into the car.

"To whom?" she said.

"Don't worry, my dear. This is—legitimate."

"To whom?" she insisted.

He lowered his voice. "To someone I wish I had never set eyes on. To make it quite clear to him that I . . ."

"If I were you, I would say nothing, Charles."

And, to his amazement, she became suddenly vehement, pleading with him.

"Charles, please! Don't make the call. It would be a mistake. I'm sure of that. Say nothing at all. Come on, let's put the car away and go for a long walk and forget about . . . telephones and . . . please!"

He stood back and stared pensively into the vivid distance of the Forest.

"He'll only begin chasing me with messages," he said. "Much better to have done and to say so. To make a clean break."

She yielded reluctantly. "Very well."

He hurried into the hotel and entered the first call-box. Calling Long Distance, he waited, the coins in his hot hand becoming clammy. Tense and apprehensive, he inserted the coins when the operator spoke, then faintly from a distance he heard the clipped, false voice.

"Charles, here!" he said.

"Inaudible! Speak louder!" the Doctor said.

Charles raised his voice. "Charles, speaking! Charles, do you hear now?"

And coldly, as though from a complete stranger, the faint, terse voice answered, "What is it?"

"Merely to tell you that I am giving you my resignation. Is that absolutely clear to you?"

"You must speak louder. Inaudible . . ."

"You heard perfectly well!" Charles shouted.

"Who is that?"

"I have already told you."

"You . . . You must have the wrong number . . ."

It was the Doctor, but the Doctor taken aback, stammering, alarmed.

"You know quite well who is speaking to you, and you understand just as well what I have said to you. Don't try to confuse matters," Charles said.

"I don't know what you are talking about. You must ring me next week. This . . ."

"I shall do nothing of the sort. I repeat: you know who I am, and you understand what I say. That's all I have to say."

He put back the receiver and returned to Edna.

"That's that."

He was just about to turn on the ignition when she put out her hand and stopped him.

"Just a moment, Charles . . ."

"What is it?"

"The person you telephoned to. You didn't mention Eva Droumek, did you? Or say where she was?"

He shook his head. "No."

"You . . . are quite sure?"

"You can believe me, Edna. I wasn't more than a cou-



ple of minutes at the phone. And all I said was that I was notifying him of my resignation."

"I'm very glad."

They returned to the bungalow. Edna alighted.

"I won't be more than ten minutes, dear. I want to change into slacks."

"I'll put the car in," he said.

The garage was behind the bungalow, at the end of a short, paved drive. He turned the car. Instead of garaging it, he drove off at speed, back to the hotel.

Both call-boxes were engaged. He stood opposite them, waiting impatiently. Like a gust of tempest which had swept him clean off his feet, he suspected that the Doctor had received news which had frightened him. There was no other explanation of that abrupt little collapse, the attempts to silence him. Some serious news . . . it was the only possible explanation . . .

As soon as one of the lines became disengaged, he hurried in.

"There's no reply from that number," the operator said, after a pause.

"There must be. There must be someone there."

The operator let him listen to the ringing tone. He waited. He kept murmuring to her, "They'll answer. There's bound to be somebody there."

"I can't hold this connection . . ."

Somebody answered. He began at once, "I want to speak to Doctor . . ."

The operator interrupted him, asking the correspondent what was her number. Charles kept saying, "It's all right . . ."

"Go ahead!"

He said again, "I want to speak to the Doctor."

He gave his name, adding, "It's an urgent matter."

The woman began, "Well . . . and then faltered. When she spoke again, he was unable to believe that he was listening to the Doctor's wife.

"My 'usband's 'ad to go out quick and never said what time he was comin' back."

"The Doctor, please. I wish to speak to the Doctor," he said.

"Yes, I know. You want to speak to my 'usband, but he went out. You've on'y jus' missed 'im. If you'd rung two minutes past, you'd 'ave been lucky, because 'e was 'ere then and 'ad no callers as far as I know of. What a pity you didn't sort o' know so's you could 'ave got on to 'im in time. Shall I take a message? 'old on while I get the pencil, if I can find one. This room's so tidy you can't find nothin' in it."

It was amazing. The vapid, garrulous personality who, over eighty miles of wire, could give such a picture of herself. He could hear her humming to herself while she rummaged for a pencil. In imagination, he saw the pair of them: the Doctor in his fake pose, she with her vulgar unassailable self-confidence.

He heard a child's voice, and then hers in a deep-throated outburst, "You get out! 'ow many times 'ave I got to tell you? If your father finds you in 'ere . . ."

She came crooning back to the telephone.

"I found a pencil. Sorry to keep you waiting."

"You're quite sure your husband left no word with you about where he intended going?"

"'alf the time I don't know if 'e's in or out. Never says. Now I think of it, there was someone rang up about twen'y minutes ago, and it was just after that 'e said 'e would 'ave to go out urgent."

He let her chatter on in her deep, ringing voice while he watched her in imagination, seeing the full face, the

great bright eyes, the big head of abundant brown hair, the whole overblown body and personality, buoyant with surplus vigor. He wondered upon what affinities love was founded in this woman and her husband.

She could tell him nothing that two or three sentences had not already conveyed. Gone out quick. Just after the telephone call. No, only that one call.

Charles drove back to the bungalow. Gone out quick, after the call from him. It indicated . . . what? Something amiss. Something . . . He longed to know just what had happened. He felt irked by the prospect of another day, another night, without news, or perhaps with the collapse already a fact, disgrace shaping around him, arrest imminent, while he idled the hours down here.

Edna was waiting for him. If only he had taken her advice and said nothing to the Doctor.

"Where were you? I looked in the garage . . ."

"Something wrong with the foot brake. I ran out again to test it. It's all right now."

He sighed to himself when they set out. How many hours before he was back in town and could assess the position? Thirty-six. Unless, tomorrow, if the weather broke . . .

## 26

To Eva, still so conscious of failure and defeat that she had momentarily resigned certain faculties, the offer of hospitality was primarily acceptable because this address

and this apparently friendly association with Bertha would not only make a better impression on the police but would also provide her with the opportunities and ruses which she had always hoped to exploit. Indeed, by the time Edna had departed, the oppressive feeling of irremediable failure was already waning. Defeat, too, was not so persistent, for now it was undergoing a transformation. Looking about her while she sat drinking tea with Bertha and Edna, she realized that her circumstances had the appearance and course which she had hoped to devise for them. It was to just such a home as this that she wished to come. It was here, posing as a refugee now grateful for hospitality, and looking for work, that she would have settled amiably with Bertha. And it was with Bertha that she would prefer to establish a friendship which, because of this woman's sociability, would soon lead to other friendships that would serve as a perfect camouflage for her real activities.

Thus, already, defeat dwindled, and in her cautious elation she was inclined to hope that success might yet come within reach of her resurgent faculties. But it was at that moment of their revival that she realized the clever tactics of these two women.

She suspected their ruse. For, of course, Edna could not denounce her to Intelligence agents or the police without involving Charles in the disaster. But was it not probable, now, that Bertha—upon the slightest pretext—could take that step, as though it were only an hour previously that she had found evidence to support the assertion? Wasn't that their plan? Hadn't the pallid, rather inert character of Edna declined such a course, and hadn't this large, forthright Bertha undertaken to pursue it for her? Or, in her warm, vigorous nature, was there only a reckless generosity and charity?

Eva Droumek did not always ascribe to others the instincts and motives and expressions which she herself possessed; but in assessing the characters and motives of Edna and Bertha, she could not understand why, with their certain knowledge of her true identity and purpose, neither of them had yet plainly challenged her with words or, as far as she could ascertain, taken steps to have her arrested.

She considered this point during the minute or two Bertha spent at the door when Edna left. She concluded that both of these women dared not inform against her. She was their problem, their dilemma and predicament; and all they could do was to take her into a relationship which would afford them a constant opportunity to keep watch on her and to impose on her the circumstances of a refugee.

She was to be their prisoner. That was what she inferred from their behavior. Nothing more. The charity, the tentative hope that from this course there might result genuine friendship and an altogether new conception of existence, did not occur to her.

Stimulated only to a degree of combative self-assertion by Bertha's large and active temperament, she was inspired only to renew her own plans and to accept what she believed was the challenge which Bertha had made to her.

"Now," Bertha said, pleasantly and briskly, when she returned to her, "we'll see about your room. I'll bring sheets and blankets and perhaps you'll help me spread them."

When Bertha brought them from the linen closet, the telephone rang. She hurried away to answer it. Eva went on making up the bed. Bertha returned almost at once. She was laughing.



"That was my old sweetheart, Fizzy."

She explained. An elderly man, telephoning a young woman, always lamenting her impatience, always ringing the wrong number.

"Poor old chap! I'm always telling him to dial again. Sometimes I snap at him. Sometimes I console him. There he is again! You speak to him. Go on! Just tell him he has dialed the wrong number."

"Perhaps it is someone else for you."

"No. It'll be Fizzy."

It was. Eva heard his thin, high-pitched and desolate voice, squeaking a little torrent of hysterical complaint.

"Is that you, Cuddly? Cuddly, this is Fizzy. It's Fizzy. They said it was the wrong number just now. Cuddly, are you there? Fizzy speaking . . . Fizzy! I got your letter. I can't make out . . . I don't know what I've done . . . simply can't think why you're so cross with me, Cuddly. Are you cross? Tell me . . ."

"You have the wrong number," Eva said.

But he squealed at her, his voice rising, cracking like a child's, the wail fluttering at her, his frantic words pouring out.

"It's Fizzy, Cuddly! Don't go . . . Fizzy speaking . . ."

She put back the receiver and returned to Bertha. It puzzled her: the shrill urgency, the names, the complaint rising at her as though she were the cause of it. But it amused Bertha.

"He keeps it up for minutes at a time. Always the same . . ."

"Mad?" Eva asked.

"He's all the disappointed lovers of this world, crying aloud their grievance. Always the wrong number."

"Very sad."

Bertha looked up at her from the opposite side of the bed. The telephone rang again.

"Eternally," Bertha said. "And always the wrong number."

She let it ring until the bed was made.

"I had better go and put him right. I'll leave you to unpack your cases. Come in when you've finished."

This time, it was not Fizzy. Eva heard her, "Oh, hullo, Lettie! How do you like your new home? Good! Yes, I did, and she'll see you next week. What did you say? No, he . . . just a moment . . ."

And then the door of the drawing room softly closing. Eva opened her suitcases. Pausing, she looked about her. It was all so manifest: the preparations that had been made; the plan; the transparent pretense of pleasurable surprise. And the evidence of a former occupant in this room.

She saw the edge of a fresh sheet of newspaper jutting slightly from the top of the wardrobe. Climbing on a chair and peering up there, she removed the sheet, ran her hand over the wood, found nothing, but saw the date of the newspaper. Last Wednesday. As early as that! And stepping down, she began a systematic and keen search of the room, her trained sight reading so many signs with an accuracy that would have startled Bertha and Edna.

The short shoelace thrown behind the fan of colored paper in the empty fireplace. Surely, a man's shoelace. And in the cinder box beneath the fireplace, two crumpled bus tickets which could be preserved, if need be, for Vort's attention. And with them, a cash sale receipt from a store in Salisbury, for braces.

The room overlooked one side of the little rancid garden. Its low window was an inch or two open at the bottom, and a foot open at the top. Eva Droumek knew

where to look for the dustings. How often had she asked the comrade who swept and dusted her own flat not to throw out of the window the fragments from ash trays, combs, dustpans? She lifted the lower window and leaned far out. And there, on the moss and the hard earth below, were the pieces of rubbish.

Her fingers gathered them. Tiny wisps of fair hair, coiled, and thrown out. More bus tickets. Some fragments of thick paper torn across, but with handwriting still legible upon them. Nothing more there.

She put down these clues on the low window sill and drew down the window, leaving it an inch or two open. She took what she had found and placed it all in the shallow pocket of her skirt while she quickly searched the room for more clues. So many of them. The old tie which had fallen behind the top drawer in the chest of drawers, and which carried the outfitter's name and address. A firm in Reading. And one of the coat hangers in the wardrobe, with the name of an hotel in Salisbury. In the two vases that stood on the narrow mantelpiece above the fireplace, there was quite a harvest: two small buttons stamped with an outfitter's name; a lead pencil stamped with a crown. And a concert program dated the previous February. After a cursory glance at them, she dropped them into her handbag.

The fragments of the label which she had gathered from the earth below the window promised better information about the previous occupant of this room. She took the crumpled pieces from her pocket and arranged them on the palm of her left hand. Somebody had written in block letters upon one side of the label.

PASSENGER TO . . .

VIA . . .

The part of the label which had borne the passenger's name and destination was missing; and an examination of these fragments revealed that that portion had been carefully removed. Her hand closed quickly and she turned to Bertha who had tapped on the door and put her head into the room.

"Still unpacking? Come to the drawing room when you've finished."

Eva's glance followed hers to the two small cases that stood open on chairs.

"There is so much room, for so few things," she said.

"Then it won't take you long," Bertha said.

The door closed. A jet aircraft screaming low across the afternoon sky drew Eva's glance towards the window. High in the window frame, there was the inevitable wedge of paper, firmly lodged between the frame and the jamb. She extracted it with the help of a hairpin. Stepping down from the chair, which she immediately returned to its place, she unfolded the paper. An envelope, empty, but addressed to Christopher Fawley, Esq., at this address.

In the greatest excitement, she swiftly unpacked her cases and arranged the contents in the chest of drawers and dressing table and wardrobe. Then she went into the drawing room. Her elation had given her color. She had luster. She seemed to float into the room before Bertha's eyes whose gaze had expected the somber, subdued and rather flaccid response which had met her previously. Her own optimistic, lively temperament rose to meet this attractive personality. She felt reassured, for this was an unsuspected Eva, transformed, with gaiety in her glance, a kind of reckless mischief in her silence.

The inviting and infectious mood made its appeal to Bertha. She turned in her chair at the writing table and

watched Eva idly scanning the volumes on the bookshelves and passing quickly to the cabinet of gramophone records. A restless, energetic Eva, seeking pleasure, walking slowly around the room, stopping before the pictures, with laughter in her great, dark eyes, and an aimless zest for activity brimming into her least movement.

Wasn't there—a musical comedy, a farce, something like that, with laughter, music, running throughout it? Or a spectacle, a gala, a joyous affair, with music threaded into the summer dusk, and laughter and—in the open? Bertha tried to think.

“Eva, what would you like to do?”

Do? The telephone, there, on the cabinet. Do? Telephone Vort, and tell him, and laugh with him from the wonder of this magnificent gesture of Fortune. Tell him that this was Fawley's nook, this was where he stayed when he came to London, this was where she would meet him. Say that—but of course it was just that Vort and the others hadn't picked up this thread, hadn't followed it from Edna to Bertha who, with room to spare, had some time ago given Fawley this bedroom, made a nest for him to come to between journeys. Just that. Tell Vort . . . And laugh loudly, from such exultation, such . . .

But what was Bertha saying?

“Is this your garden?” Eva said.

At the window with her, Bertha went on, “Would you like to come to a show? Is there anything . . .”

But no. Not to leave this house until word had been given to Vort, and preliminary plans made for him and the others to approach closer to her.

“. . . I'm afraid I have neglected it,” Bertha was saying. “I get so little time. It wants weeding. And every-



thing grows so . . . rushing up to the light, because so little sunlight reaches it. But the lilac is nice."

She smiled broadly. Her gaze penetrated the surface, sank deeper, pierced the mind, reached the flaring heart, and invaded the innermost regions of it, and was still as warmly generous as before. It approved everything. For those few seconds, the spirit of it matched Eva's, traveled with it. What her words had failed to effect, that smile from her formidable being instantly achieved. She had reached Eva: the woman who was Eva.

But she could not know that Fawley was the man, the goal, and his work the prize to be snatched. She knew only that there had been an enormous subterfuge, an intention. And it was her determination to quench that intention. That was all.

She had reached to the heart; she was matched with its excited pulse. Her great vigor of spirit trusted itself to prevent the pursuit of any opportunity that arose from a meeting with Fawley. So large, so formidable was her confidence in her purpose that the possible danger from that meeting was trivial, a risk which she could take. Larger, and more significant to her was the reality of the situation, the truth which she imposed upon the obtuse spirit, and the terribly potent facts.

In that stunning moment, Eva discerned it all. It was communicated by the vital presence, the frank smile. She was Bertha's prisoner, but her food was safety, shelter, friendship, and a release—she sensed it for an instant—a kind of release from a misconception, a fallacy which was rooted in her, in all who believed as she believed, and which distorted everything so that one was severed from something, maimed in sight, in hearing . . .

She remembered suddenly: Kulin, who was not maimed,

who was free as, in her own way, Bertha was free; the gulf between herself and Kulin; and just after the termination of her work with him, that sense of guilt . . . and the punishment.

She tore her thoughts from the contemplation of these ideas. She charged past them, past Bertha. The clamor of her exulting spirit carried her once more. Moving forward, and resting her hands on the window sill and leaning out, she looked quickly at the earth with its dark layer of grit from the air, its weeds.

Turning to Bertha, she said briskly, "I shall work in the garden, because . . ."

It seemed to amuse Bertha. "Well, if you wish, but I warn you . . . that soil is like cement."

"You have things? The tools?"

"In the little shed out there, you'll find a garden fork, and rakes, and . . . I'll show you. But are you sure . . . I'll finish my letters, and if you like we'll go out somewhere."

"Thank you. No. I am quite happy in the garden."

"Well, whatever you say, but first of all . . ."

Eva had hurried on, through the kitchen, into the garden, straight to the tottering little shed which, a fortnight previously, Bertha had started to paint.

"Yes, it will have to be painted," Eva said, tugging open the door and peering into the jumble of garden implements and cracked and upturned flower pots, seed boxes.

"I began it," Bertha said. "Here's the paint. But this brush . . ."

"I shall . . ."

Eva was tugging the big fork from a mass of tools, old matting, rope and twine. She stood back.

"No. First there must be order here."

"We'll start clearing it after I've taken you to the police."

Eva stood quite still. Then she turned her head and looked sullenly at Bertha.

"Just so that you can register your name and address with them," Bertha explained.

She looked away and dusted her hands. Behind her, Eva said, "Yes, the police. Everywhere, the police. Very well."

And hurrying into the house, ahead of Bertha, she was ready in two or three minutes.

"I am ready for the police. Then there is the garden house to be put in order, and the painting, and after that . . . the work."

"My dear, we needn't kill ourselves!"

But in her ecstatic mood, Eva could not tarry. The body with its devouring flame of energy must move, give release to the pent forces of the pulse in her heart and mind. Her will, thrusting against Bertha's, had its way, carried both of them quickly from the house, through the empty streets.

"We needn't hurry," Bertha said. "We have the rest of the day, if we wish."

As if we were on the march, she thought, flustered by the pace and the heat. And, at the station where, instead of Tommy whom she knew, there was a new sergeant—the one who had been a major in the Eighth Army, Eva was still in a hurry, marching in, marching straight to the new sergeant, past the constable's desk, her permit in her hand.

"The name is Eva Droumek, and my address is with this person. On this paper it is not the same. But I report now. And in future I will report every month to you."

Bertha smiled, looking around for Tommy, to explain to him, while Eva, thrusting her smile, her great glowing glance, her furious restlessness at the imperturbable new sergeant, repeated, "You understand? Every month I shall come . . ."

As though to confer on him a favor, or to check his presence here like a superior inspecting a subordinate.

"You will remember this so that when I come every month . . ."

"Be a pleasure," he said. "Come inside, please."

He led them to an inner room and asked them to sit down. He examined the official permit and held out his hand for the envelope. Her words flowed over him.

"You must understand . . ."

"Perfectly, thank you."

". . . that at this address on this envelope and this letter I was staying only until this afternoon. Now I am at this address with this person."

He wrote in a book, sitting erect, letting her talk, and interrupting her to say, "From Prague, Miss Droumek?"

"Yes."

"What address?"

She gave it, after a second's pause. He was still writing in the book.

"Never heard of that street," he said.

He put down his pen and looked sharply at her. His face was narrow, pleasant, and now full of question. In the silence, Bertha was suddenly conscious of the law which he represented, the law which she was deliberately eluding. Eva Droumek . . . bogus, floated into the country on a crafty deception . . . Charles . . . Edna . . .

Eva gave him her charming smile.

"When were you in Prague?" she said.

"May, 1945."

She was dazzling. Everything about her seemed to sparkle and to acquire a quality of swiftness and lightness.

"Since then," she said, "many streets have new names."

She had sped past him, eluded him. With the fountain pen from her handbag, she was quickly appending her signature to the form which he had passed her. In silence, with his eyes narrowed as though he were watching her recede into the distance, he sat turned to her. She put away her pen. Then she rose, and with a faint flourish, she placed the sheet of paper before him.

"Thank you very much," she said.

She turned and marched to the door, but he was there before her to open it, to say—with his fingers on the handle—"If you take any employment, if you change your address, or if you wish to leave your present address for longer than one night, you'll notify us, please."

"Certainly."

"I hope you'll enjoy living in this country, Miss Droumek."

He opened the door, and she was out of the room in an instant. Her gay voice sent back the words to him from halfway across the hall.

"Thank you!"

She marched on, through the outer room, past the constable on duty at the desk and the others coming and going. She passed into the station hall, and out to the street, and halted there to await Bertha. And then set the pace again, her sturdy body marching, her words and laughter tumbling from her lips while Bertha labored to keep up with her, to interject a plea for moderation.

But Eva was not listening. She heard only her own words, her own thoughts, and the exhilaration at the prospect of the future. Everything conspired to shed upon



her a bountiful wealth of opportunity. Fortune, which had been so surly, so niggardly, had yielded to her patience and determination. Defeat and failure were transformed into the first wonderful territory of success. She was hurrying back to it, to the house where Fawley came and where she would meet him, often.

Bertha caught her arm and halted.

"Eva! Why this . . . this . . . haste?"

Looking at Bertha with eyes that scarcely noticed the street scene, Eva paused in the onrush of her spirit. The large, panting figure seemed for an instant to be nothing but the symbol of retarding fate that had hedged her for the past six days. But with eyes that now saw what lay around her, Eva recognized in the flushed, faintly distressed face the being who was the instrument of generous fate.

"Bertha!" she exclaimed, contritely, taking her arm in pity, even in a sudden affection, "I am so sorry."

And walking on at Bertha's pace, she conceded that she owed gratitude to her, for fate that had been boundlessly generous demanded something, must be accorded the proper gesture. She saw in Bertha's frank countenance, and felt in her strong character, the source, the vessel of all the gifts that had been poured upon her. She offered her thanks. She declared her happiness, her gratitude.

"You are so good to me, Bertha, so kind. You give me a home, and so much happiness . . ."

Words, nothing more than words that were full of pity for the woman herself who, as Eva saw it, was the vessel, the victim of fate, and for whom there was just a little pity because her simplicity deserved that much.

Bertha was silent. She heard it. It was pity. And it was also the sly approach of the hunter. Yet she ignored it. She had her faith with which to confront Eva. She had

her weapons, and they were superior to the hunter's. It wasn't pity which she offered Eva. It was faith and determination that she showed her.

"Well, I'm pleased to hear that, Eva," she said. "But you can't exist on happiness, unless you know why you are happy, and unless you have work and wages. We'll talk about that, at home."

It was easy for Eva to say yes, of course, yes some work. Everything in her swept over Bertha's words, charged past them. She had little to give, beyond that momentary pity which, once expressed, was forgotten by her under the compulsion of too many immediate and feverish ideas. She suffered Bertha's unhurried pace as far as the house. After that, she evaded her, perhaps unconsciously, but certainly effectively.

The door had not closed behind them when she began. The shed in the garden. To be put in order. The paint brush . . . this must be cleaned before using. And when the shed had been painted once, then the garden . . .

"Before you begin, come and sit down in here. I want to discuss something with you," Bertha said.

"Very well."

They separated, to remove outdoor clothes. But having whipped off her hat and tugged off gloves and scrambled out of her light coat, Eva immediately returned to the window jamb the folded envelope. And into the vases she put the various things which she had removed from them an hour before. Even the torn label, and the strands of fair hair which she had gathered with it, were returned to the garden plot beneath the window. Everything back to its place, as a precaution in case they had been left there purposely by someone who might come to see if they had been removed.

After that perhaps a chance to telephone Vort. But

voices in the hall, and soon drifting into the drawing room. One of the tenants from the flats above.

Eva waited impatiently, hearing the voices coming back to the hall. She went briskly from the room, and without turning towards Bertha and the tenant she passed across the hall, out to the kitchen, and into the garden. Bertha joined her a minute or two later.

"Come and sit down for a moment on the garden seat, Eva."

Eva disentangled herself from the gear at the back of the shed.

"I'll get some garden gloves for this job," Bertha said. "And your skirt! You had better have an apron or something . . ."

Eva handed her the big fork and the rake. She put a stack of empty flower pots into a corner. She went on quickly as though at any moment she would break off this task and come and discuss certain matters with Bertha. Instead of standing nearby, Bertha went in and found the coarse gloves and a large apron. When she returned to the garden, Eva showed her the paint brush, holding it up in silence.

"Yes, that'll need some turpentine," Bertha said, "if I can find it. In the kitchen, somewhere . . ."

"I will look," Eva said.

She walked quickly past Bertha. Absorbed, somehow too much committed to some kind of rhythm of activity to cease what she was doing, she went constantly to and fro very quickly, giving Bertha only an occasional vivid glance, a spirited laugh, a snatch of a sentence, asking her where was this, that, the other, so forcefully that nothing—except the sternest, harshest words in Bertha's vocabulary—could have checked her.

Bertha sat down on the garden seat in the little patch

of sunlight. She and Eva did not speak the same language. They were fundamentally inimical to each other. Bertha admitted it. Even to watch Eva's energetic, concentrated movements tired her and somehow left her far behind in the little conflict of wills that had already occurred.

But the restless energy of that robust little figure alien in the drowsy, tranquil garden ravaged the air. There was a tedious, breathing rhythm about her movements that consumed peace and substituted a pulse in the afternoon's gentle decline that devoured the calm of the hour. Her words rose sweetly enough in her animated tone, and she had gaiety, laughter, but only in a kind of boast which was a mischievous taunt to Bertha who, after the hot week at business, sought refreshment.

And at last Bertha gave up. She sighed inaudibly as she rose and wandered indoors to stand in the cool room, pondering Eva, hearing even in here the brush on the woodwork of the shed in the garden. And then Eva in the kitchen, Eva calling to her to ask where something else was and what must be done now that the can of paint was empty.

"There's another can here," she said, opening the sink cupboard.

"Tomorrow," Eva said, tersely. "Or this evening, if the first paint is dry. Now I shall look after the garden."

"I'll have a meal ready at half-past six," Bertha said.

Eva was hurrying out. "Let me do that. You shall see," she said, over her shoulder, her smile enchanting, "I will make such a meal for you!" And then her laughter came, provocative, resounding, so new a sound in the flat, so attractive, and yet with that vaunting note in it that remarked her speed and her undeterred will that charged on, past laws, past principles, on and on into the inevitable distance and the end.

"To some sort of disaster," Bertha thought, slowly beginning to prepare the evening meal.

She frowned quickly. She had had troublesome employees, many of them hapless refugees whose shattered nerves broke under the stress of trivial tasks. With tact, patience, a bit of firmness and plenty of encouragement, she drew them along. And she had a belief in justice, and a hard tongue for the crafty who demanded it without cause. She understood people and was seldom deceived by them, or cheated. But Eva . . .

Eva at the door calling her to look, showing her the flower beds, dug over, weeded, with several plants thinned out and put elsewhere, certainly with skill and knowledge but without permission. And Eva explaining, saying, what she intended for this plot and that. While Bertha listened, exhausted by the hard stream of words, ideas, plans. And instead of rebuffing her commended her.

Why, she thought, when she returned to the kitchen, why meet her now, why take this as an excuse for challenging her, when there would be plenty of other opportunities? Plenty, indeed! But at present, while she was in this high mood, let her run to the end of the rope and have her hour.

Eva entered the kitchen from the garden at that moment. She passed swiftly to the bathroom, scrubbed her hands, removed the apron which Bertha had given her, and came in to help, to show Bertha the dish which she had hoped to prepare. Actually, with her hilarious mood, she was there to sweep Bertha aside.

"My dear, set the table! Go and set the table, please, otherwise when this is all ready, we shall be kept waiting!" Bertha exploded.

In an instant, Eva was gone. Bertha laughed inwardly.



There was going to be no peace by the easy way. Peace was a prize which must be won, not by mutual consent but by a contest of wills.

She sighed. "She could make ten of me," she told herself. "She has twice as much experience of this world as I have. She'll push me around and twiddle me about her finger. The fact is, I've bitten off more than I can chew."

She did not amend this conclusion during the meal. Eva sat opposite her eating voraciously. She had the appetite of two healthy, hungry men. She talked the whole time. She described the dishes she liked, the activities she enjoyed: swimming, skiing, and . . .

"Walking?" Bertha said, wearily.

She did not listen to the reply. She was exhausted. The jubilation, the stream of lively chatter and laughter, the emphasis of combat and triumph in Eva's spirit, had overwhelmed her, so that she had retreated into the quiet core of her own consciousness where there was no conflict, no guile, and nothing but the belief in principles of goodness, charity, justice. Outside, there was only Eva, rising from the table to clear away the dishes, to remove them and wash them and then to come flying into the drawing room to plead with Bertha, "Now, shall we go for a walk? Because now it is cool. Through the parks . . ."

"Sit down for a while, Eva."

"And then we go out?"

Purgatory, Bertha thought. Why doesn't someone come and amuse her? What on earth am I to do with her? Walk! If only Lettie or someone . . . if only Chris would come and take her out and take her down a peg or two! Or Lettie . . . just when I'd be thankful to see her here, she's . . . out of town, like Edna and Charles. . . . Bertha sat with her legs extended along the settee. She closed

her eyes, feeling herself floating upon the surging sea of Eva's mood.

"Turn on the radio, Eva, will you?" she murmured. "See if there is a concert. Or put on a gramophone record."

But the record which Eva selected and which she played at full volume was one that the children had brought with them, last Christmas, and played almost incessantly, and which Lettie always played three times, and which Chris, too, found amusing. "Sparky's Magic Piano."

It had the same effect on Eva. And it was only after ten minutes of it, and Eva's full-throated peals of laughter, that Bertha heard the faint, urgent tinkling of the house bell. She got up and hurried wearily into the hall.

"Somebody at the door . . ."

When she opened the house door and saw him standing there, and when she stood aside for him to come in, she felt first of all an intense, momentary relief, and then a sudden extension of her problem towards this new direction.

"I've been pumping the bell for five minutes," he said. "Left my keys somewhere in this case."

His glance went from her to the source of music and shrill laughter in the drawing room, and then returned to her. She tried to smile, to speak. She felt the problem pressing on her. She had taken on too much. It would never succeed. It would be impossible to explain Eva away, to expect Eva to toe the line, or to expect the world to turn its back while she and Edna concealed the living evidence of Charles' treachery.

"You flinging a party, Bertha?" Fawley said.

"It's Eva Droumek, Chris."

"Droumek? Oh, the . . . refugee!"

"I've given her your room, but don't let that bother you. Have you had dinner?"

"I had a bite on the train, coming up."

"I'll make up the camp bed for you, in here."

He followed her into the dining room, handing her his brief case, which she immediately locked in the side-board. She gave him the key.

"When does your train leave?"

"Monday morning, unless I get a phone message."

There was silence in the flat. "A whole week-end," Bertha said.

He nodded.

"Good," she said. "Come and meet Eva."

She led him across the hall and into the drawing room. There was silence. Eva was turning over the record. She looked up when they came in.

Her skin was softly flushed. Her eyes sparkled, and her dark hair seemed heavy and warm with a separate life of its own. Her lips were parted, and her white teeth glistened. Pausing thus, at the summit of that hilarious mood, she was glowing with the freshness and beauty of her unclouded spirit that was caught unawares. There was nothing more than that absolute, naked delight, blithe and free in her, and unmarked even by the shadow of her guile. And that was how Fawley saw her when he approached. An attractive, high-spirited, and intelligent woman of about his own age, whose vivacity was enchanting, whose beauty was exotic and natural.

For those few seconds, it was exciting to him to feel his world lose its hold on him and yield its place to this fascinating woman whose breathing, sensuous presence took possession of his senses with a smile that was frank and caressing, with a voice that was clear and strangely provocative.

"Eva," Bertha was saying, "I want to introduce Doctor Fawley."

And in the instant that this lustrous woman put aside the record and moved gracefully round the gramophone to offer her hand to him, he felt his sensibilities caught by acute, morbid consciousness of some aspect of existence in which this dazzling creature was well versed, was his superior, was so experienced where he was virginal and uninitiated. The complex, thronged world of intelligent and attractive women, remote from his life, from the reality of his work that seemed just then to be concentrated in the appellation of "Doctor" which Bertha had used, and which the magnificent eyes of the other woman appeared to deluge with a wealth of larger, more significant experience.

"And this is Miss Eva Droumek, Chris," Bertha said.

He was stale in mind after an exacting week. He had come to town to relax. He had put out of his mind all thought of work, responsibilities. And now, vividly and potently interposed between himself and his world, there stood this woman, her exotic world, her experienced and subtle personality, her obvious superiority of experience in that world wherein he was a stranger.

For a few moments, he felt that acute envy shaping to a morbid jealousy and the consciousness of experience which he had never known. He had a fleeting impression of some exotic society wherein she had existed. He envied her. He was jealous of her, of the men who had been her friends and admirers, of their social gifts, of that world which he had neglected. . . .

"Chris," Bertha was saying, "Eva wants to go for a walk. She's fond of walking. And I'm not a bit of good in that way. So . . ."

He turned to her. His realization of himself was imme-

diately whole again. His world which had dwindled under his mental staleness revived and returned him to himself. He spoke to Eva.

"Would you? We could . . . we'd have time . . . a jaunt . . ."

He turned to Bertha.

"A run out to Surrey."

She gave the suggestion her approval, because of course Chris was not an irresponsible youngster. Chris could very well take care of himself. He had his wits about him. He had shrewdness. It was more than likely that when he and Eva returned tonight he would have discovered what Edna had so soon realized. That prospect was, if anything, comforting. Sooner or later, he would have to be told. . . .

Ten minutes later, when Chris had changed into flannels and Eva had put on a different pair of shoes, Bertha saw them off.

"Chris, not too late, please! You'll probably find that I've gone to bed, when you get back."

And yet, when she closed the door behind them, there came qualms, misgivings. She should have warned him, had a word with him, explained to him, confided in him. For of course Eva, in that mood, with such a glow about her, and so sure of herself about everything, so pleased . . .

The telephone bell interrupted these qualms. Eva on the telephone.

"Please . . . Bertha!"

"What is it, Eva?"

"Please . . . So silly, I . . . My gloves, I have left I think in the room. But if they are not there, then I must look for them in the street."

"I'll see if they are here."

They were on the arm of the settee.



Waiting outside the call box, Chris strolled on a short distance. Odd to have felt that envy, that inexplicable sense of jealousy, regret. That . . . that turning of one's back upon all of one's own life, and to have pursued a fantasy, a mere impression. He upbraided himself. The reality of this woman's life was no doubt quite unlike what he had allowed himself to imagine. Bitter, perhaps. Not at all fascinating. But still . . . this unyielding but now faint sense of envy, inferiority.

He walked on. He halted at last. Love . . . He had often pondered it. An emotion, a term for so many emotions: hatred, envy, jealousy. He knew that. He knew that some of his friends had married to resolve just those things. But until this moment, he had never known, never experienced any of those emotions. Had always been whole, indivisible, sustained by his work, his responsibilities, absorbed by them, fulfilled by them. But now, conscious of an aspect of himself and his being which he had neglected.

He regarded it with a cool and detached mind. He was not a susceptible youngster. He could trust himself in any situation or circumstance. . . .

He looked back at the call box. She was a long time telephoning to Bertha about her gloves. He saw her come out, and he walked slowly back to her, seeing her coming briskly towards him. Again, but only for an instant, that impression of her touched him on an unfamiliar thread of his sensibilities. Her flavor of a wider world. But oddly, something faintly coarse, aggressive, in her gait, her smile, her eyes.

"We'll take a taxi, instead of a bus," he said. "It's quicker. And from Victoria, we'll take a train."

She was delighted. He was a worthy opponent. She took his measure with a certain amount of awe and re-

spect. She had almost forgotten, during the past two years, her own brilliant abilities as a scientist. She had had to create about herself the fantasy of Eva Droumek, the refugee, the teacher of languages flying from Communist oppression. It was enchanting to look at this man's pale blue eyes, narrow, compact face, and to realize that she was once more with someone whose intellect had affinities with hers, whose vision as a scientist met hers at some point.

His ease of manner appealed to her. His personality, with its attractive blending of intellect and character, charmed her. She felt that it would not be difficult to gain his friendship. Time would encourage it, if she were careful to let him know that the two of them were already identified as people who shared a devotion to science. She had overheard him tell Bertha that his train left on Monday morning. A train, a car, a plane, he should have said. But between this moment and his departure there were perhaps forty hours. Time enough in which to prepare everything for friendship.

She was pleased with herself. She had left her gloves in the flat so that she could telephone Bertha, and so that she could tell Fawley that she had made that call. But after the conversation with Bertha, she had made another call. To Vort.

Vort, she understood, had six subordinates, two of whom had traveled with him. The others she did not know by sight. Later, she was determined to discuss them with Vort. One of the two trusted assistants had answered her call, and she had given him a terse picture of her fortunate situation. She was "in," she had said. She had reached Fawley. She was at this address, instead of at the hotel. On Monday morning, please send someone to her, for instructions from her.

When Fawley stopped and hailed a taxi, she got in and sat beside him. He lolled unsuspectingly in his corner, with his feet crossed, and his pale, rather chilly stare resting on her.

"You've been in the news, you know," he said. "In all the newspapers . . ."

She smiled, shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, the newspapers!"

"Prague," he said, looking away. "I was there—let's see—in nineteen thirty-eight. Nice place. How do you like London?"

"Nice place."

He turned his head slowly. He wasn't smiling.

"Are you—working yet? Found a nice job for yourself yet?"

"Not yet. Soon . . ."

He looked away. "Languages, isn't it?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

He said reflectively, "That's the snag. So many people talking in so many languages."

She was puzzled by him. He was like a man in armor. She had believed at first that he was so accessible in temperament, so obvious, so much without a layer of reserve that her task would be easy. But although he had that friendly air and was without complexities, he was elusive, protected by an alertness of mind that was like so much armor. She could not thrust at him as she had done at Bertha. He was altogether more formidable. He skipped about her in conversation, and it was difficult to engage him and prod him into the channel of talk where she could steer him. His mind ran on its own course.

"I want to drink some English beer," she said.

He gave her his bland, unfathomable stare.

"So do I," he said. "That's our prime objective: a pub in the country, where they have the very best."

She laughed. "Oh, so you drink a lot of beer?"

"A negligible quantity."

Impossible man! He reminded her of Kulin who, when one felt that one was approaching him, was instantly as far away as ever. And yet so near, so alert, looking at her and reading her, as this man was.

"Do you really teach languages? Or is that . . ."

She said suavely, "Why do you ask me that?"

"When I was learning German," he said, "I had private lessons from a teacher who was a geologist."

She laughed. "So you think . . ."

"Oh, no! No, I merely asked . . ."

"You are quite right," she said. "But not a geologist. A chemist."

And without a trace of self-pity, she added, "But because I am opposed to Communism, the Communists take away my work, and so I teach languages."

Then at last she had his attention.

## 27

When the doorbell rang, Andrew looked quickly at Vort; then both of them looked at Lettie. And during the two or three seconds which elapsed before she spoke, she saw the rage, the accusations of treachery, the regrets and the

dismay which fear and the consciousness of defeat had bred in them, and which a ring on the bell lifted into panic, the ingredients of a panic which she had to ignore.

She giggled. "Well, answer it!"

Then she laughed outright at Vort. How many times had he despatched his creatures to arrest a suspect? How many families in which the Resistance had a member had met the moment when liberty, justice, decency received another wound? But she was not laughing at his discomfiture in that panic. He might imagine that the roles were now reversed and that he knew now what the Resistance everywhere must have felt when he had rung their doorbells. But he was wrong. He would never know. He hadn't any love for liberty, justice, decency. He was just Vort, the eternal student, the man with a fragment of sick philosophy which wouldn't work. And that was what she found laughable.

He dragged his surly gaze from her and went slowly out of the room, leaving her alone with Andrew who made a half-hearted attempt to rise and follow him, and then sat down again.

Her laughter ended when Vort entered the bare hall. She looked at Andrew. The rancor and everything that had come with it was gone from his expression. He was no longer afraid. Instead, he had a little frown of irritation on his swarthy brow.

At himself, she thought, because he is in the wrong camp and hasn't got out in time. He thinks he's going under.

She was sorry for him. He was a Soviet agent, trained in espionage. But all the time, he was still intact, deeply in himself. He preserved something, some dim and decent hope. "This mounting wave will roll us shoreward



soon." But the fury of the upheaval did not abate. Home was still distant, and the eternal verities were still obscure beneath the ruins and the foulness which served so well the purpose of his present masters. He belonged, nevertheless, to himself and what was innate in him. He deserved a chance. Pity acknowledged that. But of course pity . . .

She thought, "That's the curse of a job like mine. In warfare, it's a matter of life and death, for a moral principle. In peacetime, it's a game, with government policy making the rules, and the moral principle almost out of sight. The devil of it is that human nature keeps breaking in. I don't want to see Andrew juggled with Vort."

"Vort's a long time opening the door," she whispered.

The bell rang again. A prolonged peal. Andrew grimaced unhappily and sighed. His olive hands, pudgy and hairy, ran slowly over his thighs.

"Trouble," he murmured.

She believed she could see in him the tiny collapse of the private hope. She leaned forward and tapped his knee.

"Don't be a Laodicean in your own cause, Andrew!"

"Laod . . ." he said, his hand going to his waistcoat pocket for the notebook. "What's that?"

He held the pencil above the little page. At that moment, Vort opened the house door.

The Doctor said, "Vort, where is Eva?"

"At the hotel . . ."

"No, she isn't. I have just been there. The hall porter said that she merely looked in and then went away, with another person."

With the notebook in one hand and the pencil in the other, Andrew got up and walked slowly to the open door.

"That's right," Vort said. "With the woman Edna. Nobs saw them leave the apartment house. Then later on Edna comes home and with Charles, and some luggage, they go off in his car."

"But Eva? Where is Eva?" the Doctor said, furiously. Andrew moved slowly into the hall.

"And another thing," the Doctor said, explosively. "I have just had a long-distance call from Charles . . ."

"Sh!" Vort exclaimed.

Then the door closed, slowly and quietly, and although Lettie was instantly close to it and listening, she heard only a few disconnected words of the subdued conversation.

The Doctor, "He said . . . resignation . . . repeating it . . . only one thing . . . obvious . . . mean only that there . . . her arrest."

And Vort, "I don't believe so!"

After that, the voices ran together and the words were lost under . . . it was like three little waves colliding in a smother of spray. Out of it, Vort's voice rose.

"In that case, we had better . . ."

Their footsteps were audible. Vort said, "You stay in there with Lettie, Andrew."

She went back to her chair, so that when Andrew returned she was sitting there leaning forward eagerly.

"What does he want?" she said.

He stood near his chair. The notebook and pencil were clutched in his left hand. His right hand ran nervously over his dismayed face.

"Trouble, trouble. Eva is missing. Charles . . ."

And flopping into the chair, he sat with the notebook opened and the pencil ready. But his uneasy mind contemplated only disaster, the personal disaster. His heavy

face was pendulous with the burden of disappointment. His eyes were full of receding dreams. He shook his head at her.

"Eva—arrested," he groaned.

She knew that it was not true. She did not know what to say to him. She was trying to think how she might persuade him to come with her to the Colonel and rid himself of yet another uniform, the last. And then what? But the Colonel was not an altruist, and if he were he still had not the power to disregard laws that would demand Andrew. The least she could hope to offer Andrew was a long spell in a camp for the displaced. And there he would fret away his hopes, and lose his bit of individuality.

"I don't like it," she said.

It sufficed as comment on his news and her private feelings. But his gaze hung on her, for he knew, as Vort knew, as they all did, that she had been planted upon them, that she was on top, holding the cards against them, that they dared not move without her, that she . . .

She wasn't the arbiter. She knew it. Far above her, far above them, above all the millions of people, the rulers were the arbiters. The members of parliaments, of houses of representatives, of chambers of deputies. They were the real arbiters. When, she thought, when will they start to rule themselves and stop ruling us? When will they let us come together and live in peace, and when will they stop lying aloud to cover their black-browed personal ambitions? The hypocrites, the muddlers, the lifelong mischief-makers with their glib tongues and their promises to the working men, longing for power, with their emotional followers cheering them on like schoolgirls at a hockey match.

Andrew said, "There is this word, Lettie. Laod . . ."

She told him, "A person who is tepid regarding religion, politics, and other causes."

He wrote it down. The telephone rang. She put out her hand to take the call, and paused.

"You answer it," she said.

She watched him while he shifted in his chair.

"Eh, what? Ah, yes, yes! There? With . . ."

He checked himself. She could only surmise what had happened. He went on, "Address? Sure, yes, yes. Listening . . ."

She couldn't hear it. The voice at the other end was too soft. It might be Nobs, reporting. Or Eva. She heard Vort and the Doctor coming downstairs. She leaned forward and nudged Andrew, urging him to hurry. His free hand fluttered at her, unwittingly striking her bandaged arm. She winced and drew away. The house door opened and then closed. Andrew put back the receiver and turned to her.

"Sorry, sorry . . ."

He looked at her arm in the bandages.

"Who was it?" she said.

Before he could speak, the door opened and Vort strode in. "Someone on the phone?"

"It was . . ."

"Very well. Just a moment, Andrew," Vort said, almost dragging him from the chair, out of the room. The door closed behind them, and Lettie heard them ascend the stairs.

She telephoned the Colonel. It was Saturday night, but he was there. He always was.

"I think . . ." she began.

"A moment, please," he murmured; and she heard the mumble of several voices in his room. She hoped that he

would not keep her waiting, for at any moment Vort and Andrew might come downstairs.

"I'm sorry," he said, at last.

His tone was much more brisk than usual. He seemed in a hurry, and pleased with himself. She gave him a terse account of the Doctor's visit, adding, "They have just had a phone call. Vort isn't telling me who from."

"Don't let them out of your sight," he said. "On no account must you lose sight of them now."

His words were spoken sharply, and his voice had an undercurrent of satisfaction.

"Is that understood?" he said.

"Perfectly," she said.

It was like a battle order. She had no need to ask questions, now that he was moving in.

"Good," he said, and rang off.

She put up the receiver. She was filing some letters and tidying up the week's accumulation of papers when Vort came sauntering down. And he, too, was jubilant.

"Lettie," he said, taking her hat and coat from the hook and throwing them to her, "we are going out for some fun. The swings and the roundabouts. Hurry!"

It was the battle, sure enough.

"Oh, but I've got letters to type yet," she said. "Let's stay in. I'll finish the office work, then we'll make dinner here. Something good."

"Hurry, hurry!" he shouted. "A night off! A night out!"

They left the house five minutes later. He hailed a taxi, and they were driven across to the Festival. She had never even suspected that he had such a capacity for enjoying himself as he now displayed. Except for his gusty fits of horseplay when he flung himself about boisterously, he seldom sought the ordinary relaxations. Music bored



him. He found most of the modern drama devoid of ideas and lacking the elements of authentic tragedy and comedy. "All episodes, and nice lines for the leading lady to come and go on. And the verse! Such a fake freshness! You English have no sense of the dramatic. You are snobs. You set your actors and actresses above their art, whereas they should be the servants of it."

And he found the same fault with contemporary fiction and the films.

"You used to have a literature. Now you have some silly fashions, like little hats with feathers. Your novelists are all modistes, making little hats and gowns for snobs. They have nothing to write about except themselves. No story to tell. Same with the films. No stories; just episodes."

For amusement, he read his favorites: Nietzsche, Hegel, and Plato in the original text. And then he talked. Apart from that, he liked good food, but it wasn't a vice. She often wondered what was his vice. Perhaps he hadn't one. Perhaps he had attained a final satiation.

But now he was like a student. He wanted to see everything, to shove and peer and gape; to taste every innocent thrill; to laugh; to prod Andrew into hilarity with him; to nudge Lettie; to swill his favorite beer and make her do the same. And all the time, in the deep pocket of his jacket into which his right hand seemed permanently plunged, there was his automatic, the Walther. Even when he lounged at the little tables and drank so much beer, his hand was there.

When he had rushed them exuberantly through as much as he wanted to enjoy, they left. He paid for everything, recklessly, grinning at her.

"You can pay another time," he said.

She knew what he meant by that, and she wished that

he would disclose what lay behind his jocularity, his heavy quips, and so much drinking. But he went on, rather laboriously, leading them from one thing to another, until she wondered if there was really anything more than this: a night out; his fits of high humor carrying all three of them into momentary gaiety which subsided and then began again. It was becoming tedious. That, and the beer. And yet he gave himself to it, and seemed to enjoy it. At last, she revolted.

"If you want a real drink, and some real fun, why don't you try a night club?"

"Plenty of time," he said. "Do you want a real drink? Whisky?"

She grimaced. "This stuff . . . this beer . . ."

"Makes you loose at the knees?"

He put the question almost clinically, but did not wait for an answer. If, she thought, I'm to be made drunk and incapable . . .

He glanced at his wrist watch and rose.

"Very well. Night club," he said.

She knew then that he had a program, perhaps a timetable. He said nothing about it. He talked cleverly. He had taken plenty to drink, but the only effect of it all upon him was to give a febrile quality to what he said.

It was the same theme as before. Spirit and Matter. But she was enthralled. He was at such a pitch of excitement and satisfaction; and his words were so faithful to his clear thoughts that he excelled himself.

"That is our true nature, Lettie. Spirit, not Matter. In the twelfth century, there was the summit of existence in Spirit Predominant. Look at the art of that century and see the marvelous quality of light and color! But now . . . the chaos of Matter Triumphant!"

Andrew spoke up. "In my country, there is always

Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end . . .”

Vort stared at him. The taxi stopped, and they all got out and entered the night club where Vort was expected. He had a table reserved. In the din, the heat, the haze and confusion, he was at last enjoying himself. He ordered drinks, made jokes and laughed at them in a way that made even Andrew shake with laughter.

The first drink was genuine, the rest were harmless. There was a floor show. Vort looked disdainfully at it. The flesh. Then he looked away, saying something which Lettie could not hear distinctly. He ordered some salad, ate a little and pushed his plate away and wanted to dance. Andrew hadn't touched his salad. He swallowed his drink. He was sober, inured to all the liquor. But Vort looked flushed and truculent, glaring at the nudity, frowning, saying he wanted to dance.

Suddenly, he got up. Lettie rose. She wasn't going to let him out of her sight.

“You want to dance, Vort?”

He nodded, hurrying them out. They went to another night club, somewhere just north of Kensington. And there he could dance, after more drinks.

He was light on his feet, and there was space enough to move round. Lettie would have enjoyed it if her arm had not throbbed so much. Too many times during the evening, it had been jostled, shaken. And the drinks hadn't soothed it. By the end of the fourth dance, the floor was filling and it was hard to move without an occasional collision. Always against her arm. And when Vort brought her back to the table where Andrew sat so patiently, she felt suddenly exhausted, sick. It was Vort who saved her.

He looked at his watch. Again, the program and the timetable. He got up, paid the bill, proffered an aston-

ishing tip, and went out. There was still a crowd, and Lettie wriggled painfully through it. But outside, the air was fresh. She breathed it gratefully and got into the taxi and heard Vort instruct the driver.

Then, at last she knew their destination. He had not given a number. Just the name of the street. The street behind the one in which Bertha lived.

She relaxed. It was easy to simulate a mild drunkenness.

"Vort, where are we going? Let's . . . home. Oh, let's . . . go to sleep."

She let her head sink. She was thinking rapidly. The time . . . perhaps half an hour before dawn. And . . . in her pocket, coins, always ready, for use in a call box. And Vort . . .

Without a word, he passed Andrew an automatic.

"Take it. I have mine. Now, listen . . ."

The taxi stopped. Vort paid the driver and strolled a short distance. When the taxi had disappeared, he spun around and drew Andrew apart, speaking rapidly in an undertone. Then they came back for her. And walking swiftly, with Vort on one side of her and Andrew on the other, they entered the lane which ran behind Bertha's house.

They were all there: Nobs, in beggar's garb, and the others. Noiseless, furtive shapes, posted in successive garden doorways along that cobbled alley in which weeds grew as in a lane. Nothing was said. There was no sound at all. In the hush of the tranquil summer night that extended over the city, they too were hushed. But their purpose was obvious. Violence. A monstrous, daring expression of it that would crash through to Fawley.

Vort halted outside the little door leading into Bertha's garden. The others came around silently. It seemed

to Lettie that in the sleeping world on this Saturday night they had everything in their favor. For herself, there were no favors. Luck ran dry here.

Vort sent Nobs and the others back to the alley's entrance. She understood that not far away they had a car.

"Wait for us. An hour, two hours. But wait," he said.

She gave Nobs a wink, and oddly enough had one from him before he turned away and disappeared. Vort eased open the garden gate and went in. He held her by the arm. All three of them settled down near the old lilac tree. In Vort's right hand, there was his Walther. Andrew, too, had one.

"All I've got are six pennies for a call to warn the Colonel," she thought.

"Vort," she whispered, looking at the windows of . . . Fawley's room, Eva's, or Bertha's? . . . and wondering if Fawley were there, "what are we . . ."

He drove his elbow at her for silence. A cat mewed softly in a neighboring garden. She felt that she was about to giggle. Quite audibly, Andrew snuffled with uncontrollable laughter, and to her surprise Vort turned to him, smiling, sniffing out his little spurt of laughter. Then they were silent again, waiting.

He was so sure of himself. Waiting, she supposed, for a signal. She cautiously nudged Andrew. For some seconds, there was no response. The Laodicean, torn between so many immediate chances that obscured the larger one. It was a pity. He could have helped her, and helped himself.

Suddenly, she felt the pressure of his arm against hers in an answering nudge, a little succession of nudges. It encouraged her. She could take a chance with him. But Vort? Vort seemed prepared to wait for hours, although of course dawn was imminent.



When Eva had divulged to Fawley that she was a chemist, she had expected him to express an immediate interest that would lead to conversation regarding her own life. She was determined to hold the conversation on that subject.

One had, of course, to begin it. It was like taking a sailing vessel out of harbor and into the path of a favorable wind. But who was the ship and who the wind, she found difficult to say.

Fawley did not respond as she patiently hoped he would. After that interested glance which had followed her disclosure, he was silent, sitting there with his hand limply resting in the taxi's arm loop. Negligence in his attitude. Indifference in his voice which was humming a tune. Discretion in his avoidance of that opening gambit. But she knew the type. Kulin had been like that.

"I had a friend who was very much like you," she said, casually.

He sat up. "Here we are! Victoria," he said.

And after that, there was the train journey during which he sat opposite her reciting cricket scores from the evening newspaper which he had bought, as though she herself were as interested as he was in the matches.

"What a collapse! Look at it!"

He passed the newspaper to her and pointed to the results.

"Hundred and thirty-nine for seven! Lucas, out for eleven!"

"It is extraordinary!" she exclaimed. And after a pause, "Do you play this game?"

He shook his head. "No."

"Neither do I."

She returned the newspaper to him. The point had been lost on him. He wasn't snubbed. He was laughing, stuffing the newspaper into his jacket pocket, saying, "I suppose you think it's a long way to travel for a glass of beer. Almost thirty miles."

"If you like this beer . . ."

"I don't," he said.

"You said it was some of the best."

"It is."

"Then why don't you drink it?"

"I prefer stout. I thought you said you would like some English beer . . ."

She looked away. He was making fun of her and becoming a little wearisome.

"To tell you the truth," he said, "I don't know the difference between ale, beer, and stout."

She laughed loudly. "Then why do you talk so much about something you don't understand?"

"It's a universal habit."

That, too, amused her, and she laughed again, this time at the picture of the decadent Western world engulfed in words.

"Quite right," she said. "Everybody talks . . ."

But he was not listening. His attention had wandered again, and he was looking pensively through the window at the glimpses of suburban scenes around the station through which the train had passed.

"You fly, don't you?" he said, sitting back and looking at her with his cold blue eyes.

"Once, I belonged to a flying club. For three years now it has been difficult and the club is not there," she said.

Then that topic ended, as the others had done. And like them, it seemed to her to have its end in him, behind his eyes, in his thoughts, which no matter what trivial topics came from their surface, were all the time pursuing a purposeful and lengthy reasoning which related to her. She felt vaguely discomfited. He was like Kulin . . .

She looked out of the window. Kulin, of course, had her respect long before she had met him. This man. . . . She gave him a rapid glance and looked away again, feeling at once an immoderate desire, a kind of intense hunger, for a crumb from the rich table at which he sat, for a word which would invite her to that table from which she had been absent for three years. All the happiness and fulfilment which she had found in her work as a chemist echoed in her. A nostalgia took hold of her. She saw in retrospect the years of girlhood and youth in which the great hand of the state had moved her away from the course in modern languages, into science, into an enchanting world, and then out of it.

She felt like an outcast, bereft of so much that she was abject. The vision of her lost life and all its remarkable joys that had their source in science seemed concentrated in the happy man sitting opposite her. She had envied Kulin for his wholesome intellect which sustained an edifice of beautiful truth from which he would yield nothing to distracting forces. She had shared with him glimpses of that truth. He had expounded a little of it to her groping mind. But now she was excluded. She saw it glowing in the living presence of the man opposite her, and she longed for a particle of its substance, for a word that would comfort her lamenting heart. But she dared

not beg it. Tantalized, remote from it, she could only envy him, hope for the crumbs which, without realizing it, his mere presence could give her.

Everything of her mission and her being had come to this: this shape, this realization of herself. With a pang of regret, she saw not only her lost happiness but the nature of her mission.

Her mind reeled at the idea of it. Revolted and dismayed she understood why she was here, sitting opposite Fawley. She was here not as a disciple of science, not to serve it as she had done formerly, but to pervert it, to snatch part of its essence and return with it to her masters for their ends. And those ends? Never pure, but always devouring, always disdainful of truth, humanism . . .

In an onrush of bitter emotion, she saw how she had been used. Her work taken from her. This degenerate task given her. This—a spy, playing upon human credulity, a murderer killing two young men, a creature upon the side of malignant and corrupt ideologies that had had their way with her, that cared so little for any truth that they compelled obedience from their scientists. She was the accomplice of lost souls like Vort and his subordinates. She was far out upon foul purposes. An enemy of mankind, the loathsome traitor to what she had loved, the hapless tool. . . .

But in Fawley's amiable presence, there was some comfort for her; and presently the bitter, stunning onrush of her thoughts became less harrowing.

The train was traveling slower and entering a station. Fawley rose.

"We got out here."

She alighted and walked beside him along the platform, over the bridge, past the ticket collector, through the streets of a tiny town full of evening sunlight. When

Fawley stopped and took the tattered map from his pocket, she held one side of it and watched his finger travel over the sheet.

"Just to show you where we are. Here," he said.

Maps, of course, she could read quickly and expertly. She read this one swiftly; but she looked up at Fawley and shook her head.

"I don't know where I am," she said, laughing softly.

"But here," he said, glancing intently at her, "I have just shown you. Here is the station. This road, along here, leads southwest to the open country, here."

She folded her portion of the map over his.

"If I examine all the maps, I still will not know where I am," she said.

He kept his gaze on her while he put the map into his pocket.

"There's a pub at the end of this road. The one I mentioned. We'll have a drink there," he said.

In silence, they set off again. His occasional glances at her seemed to her to reach from a great distance and to touch her in the depths of the squalid world into which she had declined. Conversation had ended between them. She had renounced all the vaunting convictions, the determination and self-confidence with which she had set out from Bertha's flat. Bewildered and lost, there was only Fawley to whom she could turn in the terrifying perplexity that held her.

She was no longer the hunter in sight of her prey. She was the hunter ambushed by her quarry. She entered the saloon bar of the shining little pub, and sat next to him on a stool at the counter. The florid landlord greeted Fawley.

"How d'you do, sir! Nice evening."

He gave Eva a nod of greeting. He served the stout



and the light ale which Fawley ordered. There were only four other customers in the bar. Two sat at a table. The others stood at the counter. Fawley nodded to them.

One of them was a heavy man of about fifty with a huge moustache. He was dressed in flannels, with a blue jacket with brass buttons.

"Amazing collapse," he said. "A very poor show, indeed."

"I should have thought Lucas could have done better," Fawley said.

The customer on Eva's side said, "Not against Terry."

"A fluke," the other said.

The second customer was small and amusingly sure of himself. He stood with his hands in his pockets, very erect. He brought his glass of beer along the counter and began to draw diagrams, dipping his forefinger into the wet circlets of liquor.

"Let me show you . . ."

She listened to the discussion, because she was included in it, but presently she lost interest in it and listened instead to the two men at the table behind her.

"Well, you'll see, you'll soon see. First dictator this country has ever had, unless you count Cromwell."

"But it couldn't happen. He'll have to come in constitutionally."

"He's there! He'll do it overnight."

The voice rose in the momentary silence, adding, "First we'll hear about it will be at breakfast. Over the eight o'clock news. He'll come to the microphone and tell us how nice it's going to be for us. And mind you, he knows how to talk."

Fawley put down his empty glass.

"Let's go."

He smiled when they were outside in the sunlight, the soft air.

"Did that surprise you?" he said, and because she seemed puzzled, he added, "The exponents of free speech, in there. Every man his own prophet, politician, and pundit."

She shook her head. She was not yet familiar enough with this country to understand the people. All she sensed was an essential liberty which was audible in the lives of everyone she had encountered since her arrival in this land. It was an established factor, deep in their lives. There was here no slavery. There were no chains.

She achieved an absolute realization of herself. Always the dupe, the blind weapon. The suspicions traveled into the roots of her egotism. She felt wounded, weakened. She remembered Travek, and then Ostrowski, and her work with them. And the manner in which she had opposed both of them, not as a scientist but as something else. An instrument of the state's devious, sly, and ruthless policy. And after that, her assignment to Kulin, the greatest of the three.

In the clarity of cold realization she knew what had happened. He was a being great and perfected in himself, a truly great scientist, not a clever man enjoying a tiny corner fitted with apparatus, but a man whose mind had a magnificently comprehensive vision of the cosmos, the structure of life, of things, of men and women in their passions and their culture. So far beyond her narrow consciousness which was blurred by the pressure of Marxist-Leninist doctrines. But his fine tolerance of her, his appreciation of her real position which was that of the cruel instrument sent to destroy his work. And her failure, because he had been too formidable an opponent, too well

armed for her to oppose him. She had not even known—she had seen only his kindness, his patience and tact, his genius. Never a vestige of his resentment. But suddenly—and she realized it now with acute humiliation—the state removed her, rejected her, cast her out after her failure to destroy Kulin, and gave her this mission. This deceitful task. To hunt down this man. . . .

Speechless and utterly dismayed, she walked beside Fawley to the open country beyond the small town, and along the road bordered by fields and the first acres of the broad heath which, flanked to the east by pine woods on rising ground, fell away to the west, in a great carpet of many colors below the descending sun and the expanse of cloudless sky.

It was a scene of such extent and splendor as to engage all the senses and check for a while the desultory conversation which passed between Eva and Fawley. He supposed that, like himself, she was enjoying what was abundant about them: the space, the panorama of light, the fragrant air, the entire freshness. He glanced at her to observe her response.

She was sunk into herself. Her gaze was upon the road and her eyes saw only the portion just ahead of her. Her expression was somber and leaden, reflecting nothing of all the soft and dazzling wonder of light that flowed around her. The buoyancy was gone from her step and she walked as though she were trudging sullenly upon a path of personal tragedy.

He looked away. The road presently narrowed to an outlet upon two lanes. He chose the one which ran eastwards to a long hill covered with pines. And when he stood at last with her at the fringe of the wood, he again glanced at her. This time, she noticed him. Turning to him, she gave him a quick smile. Into it, there flowed a

slow effulgence of light and something of happiness. But it did not reach the full expression which it had had when he had first met her. It showed for an instant and then dwindled rapidly into the heavy, somber features whose expression was that of something far more profound than a momentary distress induced by the realization of her circumstances. He felt that a sourness was there, a self-reproach and disgust. It rippled across the face for an instant.

He took out his map and unfolded it to show her their present position, and the contours of the scene. But for some reason, he did not speak. Behind them, on the fringe of the wood, there was a felled tree. She walked slowly to it and sat down and ran her hand slowly over the soft, warm carpet of pine needles and peat.

Folding the map and returning it to his pocket, he went to her and stood with his back to a tree. The level rays of the sunlight lay over the great hollow heath before them, and were laced amidst the trees behind them. It was an enchanting scene, and he enjoyed it. But she seemed detached from it, lost in a private world from which he could not entice her.

## 29

He was puzzled by the swift decline in her of that vivacity and gaiety and luster which had met him when he had entered the room and seen her for the first time.

And all the liveliness of her words when the two of them had set out, that too was gone. The whole animated spirit was empty of an attractive quality, and the beauty which he had seen at that first encounter and which had had such an impressive effect upon him was now burdened with a tragic essence.

He could have ascribed it to many factors, but none of them seemed relevant. It was not grief, or anything relating to her circumstances as a refugee. She seemed to have excluded him, by her detachment, from some aspect of her life which he could never understand, never experience, and only vaguely surmise.

He remembered again, and very sharply, that curious effect which she had had upon him when they had first met. That inexplicable envy and jealousy, and that feeling of inferiority and inexperience. A glance at her now sharpened it all again, developed it. And she was looking up at him, reflectively, her eyes slowly filling with light, her smile touching him, her awareness of him like a glance from an exotic world, almost condescending.

He remembered then what she had told him in the taxi on the way to Victoria. She had inferred that she had been a chemist. He had been puzzled then by that fact. He could not place her, this refugee, this teacher of languages, this chemist, this woman whose presence had the flavor of experiences which he had never known.

He feared that the least word from him might plunge him headlong into all that her complex character and temperament seemed to remark. He had always avoided intense personal relationships that threatened to involve him and distract him. His friendship with Bertha, Edna and Charles and a few other people in his own profession sufficed him. The rest of his life was in his work with which he was completely identified. He gave little that



was intimate or profound to anything else. And he was not prepared to do so now.

He had nothing to say to the volume of this woman's mood. He clung to what was secure in him: the image of himself as a scientist in a highly responsible position, eminent, engaged on research of an important kind for his country's government, the leader of a talented team of scientists. And now, out here with this woman, he was determined to retain himself for himself and not afford that hot flash of envy and jealousy the least opportunity to develop.

It was Eva who broke the silence. She was once again animated, quick, intensely gay, with her hand open before him, her upturned face glowing at him.

His expression was just as impenetrable as before. He was not to be disarmed.

"The map," she said, softly.

He unfolded it for her, and watched her as she inclined her head over it and studied it. He noticed how her glances went quickly and expertly from point to point on the map, and how she occasionally checked a feature with the road below the wood, the heath, the town lying in the bright distance.

"Here we are at three hundred feet," she said. "And this wood rises to three hundred and fifty . . ."

He took the remark into what he felt was some accurate deduction relating to her life. A woman who had been rich, perhaps, and who had dabbled with various pursuits. Flying, a little science, and so on. But he felt, too, that at any moment she would disclose with a single sentence something that still might overwhelm his image of himself and devastate his inner life. It seemed imminent. It was in the silence that extended around them and in which the distant sounds from the road below, the

farms, and the wood behind them had all subsided. There was now only the heavy, fragrant scent of the pines, the loam, the earth perspiring after the warm day. And the warm, sensuous presence of this woman beside him.

"You are accustomed to reading maps, aren't you?" he said.

She folded the sheet and returned it to him.

"It is very simple," she said.

She turned towards the wood, and taking his arm she set off with him along the ascending path, through the patterned sunlight.

"I suppose, when you took a navigation course . . ."

She laughed quickly. "But I am not a navigator! I was a chemist."

"Oh, yes, a chemist!" he said, tactfully.

She gave him a taunting glance.

"Yes," she said, casually.

He couldn't reconcile it with what he felt about her. He thought for a moment that she was telling a lie, trying to create a picture of herself which, although both he and she knew it to be untrue, somehow sustained her. Many women did that. His colleagues' wives, professors' wives, women who had taken modest degrees, read a few books upon certain subjects, termed themselves psychologists, economists, literary critics, and lived upon a fantasy constructed of repeated falsehoods that nobody ever disputed. And this woman was probably the same.

"You are a doctor of medicine?" she said.

"Science," he murmured.

She turned to him with a look of surprise.

"This is very interesting! You are professor of physics, applied science, chemistry . . ."

"No. Research chemist," he mumbled.

He wanted to change the subject. But she was ahead of him.

"So you, too, are a chemist?"

"But I read somewhere, in some weekly periodical, that you were a linguist," he said.

"Yes, I explained to you. Before I was compelled to teach languages, I was a research chemist. But of that I say nothing because—here I cannot hope to find work of that sort. Here, I must teach languages."

"But—of course, I suppose there might be a few difficulties at first. Until you had become naturalized, if you intend to. But I'm sure there are jobs in industry, plenty of vacancies for research chemists."

She laughed behind her closed lips and gave his arm a quick, tightening grip.

"You are so funny," she said. "Where do you think there is work for me? Suppose you had to fly from this country and become a refugee in another country. Would you be happy to find a little job—in industry—in a little laboratory where the boys and girls try to find a formula to make some nice soap or some new flaked soap to wash silk stockings?"

He sensed the reproof in her words. Her laughter sounded. He felt that he had patronized a woman whose knowledge and experience were comparable, perhaps, to his own.

"I didn't mean quite that," he said. "There are all kinds of research jobs. I wasn't trying to advise you. I was merely trying to say that it is a pity that you don't feel you could continue here . . ."

She held his arm tightly again for a moment, and stopped laughing.

"No, I understand," she said. "I should have told you that I was first assistant of Travek . . ."

He halted abruptly and stared at her. His face told her nothing. It was his silence that expressed his amazement.

In a casual tone, she said, "On some problems of hysteresis."

"Travek—he is—Travek is extremely famous for his work on that subject," he said.

"You have read his many papers?"

"None of them. But I know—I've heard of him."

"And have you heard of Ostrowski?"

"Naturally . . ."

"His work on enzymes?"

She was smiling. He nodded. "It's very well known. Accepted . . ."

"I was with him for some years."

"Really?"

"Yes, really," she said, lightly and mockingly.

"I know his work. His . . ."

"Yes, the initial theories. But he lost sight of some subsidiary problems. He was not—one would say that he was a man of limited . . ."

"Yes, that's true. His successor—the work was published, wasn't it? His successor—her name was Madame Lerinskaya . . ."

"That is so. Tania Lerinskaya."

"She took his theories much further. Did you know her?"

"Yes, very well indeed, of course."

He was startled and dumbfounded. "But—these people are—they were Soviet scientists!"

"Yes, in Soviet Russia. I was lent to the Soviet Academy by the Czech government under a scheme of exchange, you call it?"

"Oh, I see!"

"And when I leave Ostrowski's committee, I work with Kulin, in Bucharest."

"With him!" he exclaimed.

He gaped at her. His face was flushed.

"For four years," she said, "and then back to Prague."

"With Kulin," he said, turning away. "What luck!"

He looked again at her. She was laughing softly.

"You are so strange!" she exclaimed, looking up at him with her brilliant eyes full of laughter, "I tell you this about myself to please you, but you look at me as if I have frightened you!"

Her laughter echoed in the wood. It bewildered him. If what she had told him were true, she had worked with giants. He was looking at a woman who had known those men, assisted them. They were scientists whose work and repute—rising above national boundaries—had influenced scientific thought. Their discoveries had extended into new directions and made possible important new developments that had encouraged remarkable advances into certain fields. Something of all those activities had reached his own work which, although concerned with quite different problems, had felt the ripples from those movements. And looking now at this woman whose knowledge and experience had been at that source, he was both surprised, elated, and yet confused. His personal life, in this encounter with her, was disturbed. That oppressive sense of his inferiority to her was curiously confirmed and made actual by what she had said. And yet, in another degree, he felt that he was her superior, for the fact emerged that his own researches had not only run parallel to those of Kulin but had already gone beyond them and were already the basis of extensive developments which he was directing. For Kulin, so he



understood, had disappeared, been removed, was lost under one of those clouds that so frequently descended upon scientists in Russia and the satellite states. And the scanty information of a scientific nature that was published or that became known was becoming less available and less reliable.

He wanted to ponder all these things. He longed to ask this woman a great many questions, general and particular; but he dared not indulge such a conversation that fringed so closely upon his work. One indiscreet question might reveal the exact nature of that work. One incautious answer to one of her remarks or questions might disclose what must be kept secret.

Silence was his duty. But she interpreted it as though it came from doubt, suspicion.

"You think I am telling you lies?"

She laughed again.

"No, no. I'm surprised, that's all," he said. "I never imagined that I was talking to someone who . . ."

"A nice surprise?"

"Yes, of course."

"But you look so—so . . ."

She pulled a face in imitation of his. "Like this."

He gave her a faint smile. He was groping with all manner of thoughts and trying to examine facts. He was curiously lost to her. She took his hands in hers.

"Come!"

The path on which they stood led down an incline and into a large hollow. She tried to hurry him down that slope and towards the hollow, and the descending path beyond it.

"Quickly! Run—run with me!"

She dragged him a few paces, his reluctant weight resisting her. He seemed rooted in his thoughts from which

she could not entice him. Suddenly, she let go her hold of him and raced ahead, running wildly, her arms extended like wings, her body light and eager. She reached the hollow, turned quickly, drew breath, and awaited his tardy approach.

When he came to her, she was still flushed and panting. Her soft laughter fluttered at him. She put her hands to his cheeks and with a murmur of laughter fading behind her lips, she kissed his lips slowly, and drew away.

She looked solemnly at him for a little while.

"There," she said, quickly and gaily, "now we will forget about it, because what I have told you is of the past which is finished now for me. Quite finished. I tell you these things, but you will forget them and never speak of them to other people, because I too must forget them and find some other work."

She took his arm. "Now we are two chemists. You are a fortunate man, because you have work. I have no work. Only so much to forget."

He was silent. He let her lead him through the hollow, out along the descending path. He was still trying to find his way through a confusion of thought, but upon that entanglement Eva Droumek had already sent words that gave him a foothold.

He recovered himself. Reason guided him out of the perilous regions of the emotions, clear of unsuspected currents of jealousy and envy. He was still astonished and vaguely ashamed at himself for that inimical drift into morbidity. That error of the spirit, amended of course by reason, so soon by reason. And Eva Droumek saying that he was fortunate, and that she was unfortunate. Which, he supposed, was true.

He had regained his balance. Then cautiously he was able to discuss with Eva something of her work with

Travek, Ostrowski, and Kulin. The outline of it all, the known facts, the scientific direction. He enjoyed that. It was something which the lowliest chemist straight from university could have indulged. But it went a little further. It gave Eva a chance to talk impersonally about such matters, about something which had fulfilled her but which she had unwittingly betrayed.

She returned to it now. There was no longer the wood, the heath, the last sunlight entwined amidst the lofty branches of the pines, the fragrant air, and the descending road. There was only Fawley, and this chance to unburden herself of the pent weight of betrayed devotions. She remembered Travek, Ostrowski, and how she had been the blind, ruthless instrument in the hands of the state that wished to abolish them. She remembered Kulin who had been too great for her to destroy. But . . . nearly . . . if she had remained a year longer with him . . . if the state had not discarded her both as a scientist and an instrument . . .

But now, with Fawley who was to have been the hunted, she atoned. She renounced her mission. She wanted only this conversation, this communion with one who was as eminent as Kulin and who might one day attain to greatness. The harmless, general conversation flowed over processes, formulæ, the results of work already known throughout the world. But these were more than the crumbs. This conversation restored her. She had absolved herself. She had flung away her mission. She wanted nothing from Fawley except this chance, and perhaps others in the future. The opportunity to converse with him about knowledge which they shared.

She astounded him. An hour or two would not suffice to cover the facts which she disclosed so glibly, so expertly, and without the least scruple. Whole days, weeks, months

were needed in which to gather the full substance of the main facts and developments which she mentioned. She spoke of matters which had never been published, and which were still being pursued here. In some directions, the information was already known, in others it was imperfect, in others it was advanced. He had friends and acquaintances to whom her information, her brilliant knowledge, would have been, at least, extremely interesting and a matter for the most earnest consideration. And in his own particular field, what she had to say about her work with Kulin was so challenging, so much a matter for the keenest study, that he was already asking himself if he should, this night, contact certain members of his committee and explain to them that this woman . . .

The conversation had progressed far beyond a kind of student discussion. It was on a higher level, far up. She could not know that at the mere sound of his few, general remarks that told her nothing of his own work, she had flown on and was expounding so much of Kulin's theories that had been lost in the cloud that had fallen upon that man. Whole gaps were being filled by her. They were invaluable because they afforded a complete vision of Kulin's theories that were parallel to those of his own and proceeding, if Kulin was still developing them.

He listened with a casual air. He nodded when she needed that much response from him. He guided her on with a mumbled word or two. She was lost in her past, and yet so much alive, so animated and happy in this chance to speak of her work.

And thus, both of them continued down the road, going eastwards by a circuitous route back to the small town and the railway station. There, awaiting the train on the platform, the conversation ended; and in the silence ques-

tions shaped in his mind. He walked with her to the far end of the platform, in the dusk.

"You have told me a lot about Travek and the other two—Ostrowski and Kulin; but you haven't said a word about their famous assistant, Lerinskaya," he said. "Were you and she in the picture at all? I remember at one or perhaps two international conferences held not long after the war, her name came up, with theirs. She figured with them. Especially with Travek. . . ."

"Yes, with him. Because at that time, she had not been sent to Kulin."

"No. But what became of her? She had something of a reputation. . . ."

She pouted, and then smiled wryly, saying, "What becomes of so many scientists in Russia?"

"Yes, of course."

And after a brief silence, he added, "But didn't you hear of her? She went on to assist Ostrowski, didn't she? She had a name. She developed theories of her own. The impression in the rest of the world was that she put him out of the limelight with her . . ."

"Oh, no! He was much more than she was!" she said.

"But what became of her? You worked beside her, but you haven't said a word about her."

She wondered what she could tell him of that ghost of herself called Tania Lerinskaya who still wandered through Travek's, Ostrowski's, and Kulin's laboratories. Her lamenting spirit hated that ghost and yet was eternally bound to it.

In an undertone, she said, "I always believe that she was a clever woman sent to those scientists by the Secret Police."

He had a frown of disgust. "What a country!" he said. She nodded. "But who knows . . ."



The train came in. It was crowded with people returning from the heath and the coast. He found a compartment with two vacant seats, and sat down opposite her.

## 30

At once, the little distance which separated her from him, and the abrupt cessation of their conversation, and her exotic presence contrasting so acutely with the commonplace faces beside her, presented her to him in terms of a complex problem which it was his responsibility to solve. In doubt and apprehension, he tried to assemble the facts.

First of all, there was the fantastic publicity that had floated her to this country. Next, there was her omission from her statements to reporters of any reference to the important positions which she had held, and her divulgence to him of so much of her past life, and her insistence of her intention to find work as a teacher of languages. Why? And there was the fact that she had assisted three Soviet scientists. This he found hard to reconcile with her Czech nationality and her personal opposition to Communism. And there were other facts, some clear, others nebulous, that engrossed him. Upon all of them, he put the hard, strong light of cold reasoning.

He did not doubt that she had assisted those three scientists. She had given him sufficient proof of her scientific knowledge and experience, and of her personal compre-

hension of the work of those men, to persuade him to believe what she had said. But the whole story seemed to him to be encompassed by a peculiar obscurity of essential fact, and to have elements that were both contradictory and inexplicable. And it was this that rendered her in a dubious light in which her own character appeared complex and evasive.

Pondering it all in the crowded compartment, and from time to time meeting her glances, he tried to create from the facts which she had given him, and the others that he had read during a recent journey, a feasible version of the last eight or nine years of her life. But here again he was confronted by statements which he could not accept as being true. That remark of hers that she had been loaned by the Czech government of the time to the Soviet Academy: was that true? In all the overlapping and entwining of national pressures on the continent of Europe during the past decade, as well as in the terrible confusion of warfare, the individual had been submitted to a bewildering succession of conflicting laws. The grim, evil tempest of the Nazi reign—what had that done to the most upright and virtuous person? Was there not some taint left upon all by that pressure? And elsewhere, had it not been the same? So that to survive at all, one's personal morality had had to submit to perversion, distortion, in order to wriggle one from the crushing weight? And this woman—to whom a few lies, a few deceptions, a forged passport, illegal papers, had sufficed to carry her into Russia where she was safe from Hitler?

He could not determine it all. The elements of her story would not merge into a reasonable pattern. Lies and fragments of lies, little subterfuges, and patent pretenses seemed prolific everywhere in her statements. There were omissions, too, that left cloudy gaps. And her

character in its obtuseness, its febrile moods, its sudden swerves, and its peculiar hue, seemed to him to remark her as a woman whose nature bred trouble for her and for all who came into her life.

His suspicions increased. He could not as yet clarify them. He did not attach much importance to them. Because he had so few concrete facts to support these suspicions, he tried to maintain a more favorable impression of her. It was difficult to do, for as he now saw her it was becoming obvious to him that the essentials of her story were alarmingly contradictory, and that she herself was as impossible to determine as were the furtive, ambiguous features of government, human existence, and national policy in the region from which she had come.

The police state, the grim breeding ground of awful expedients, of sudden arrests, mock trials, and the numerous hysterical suspicions that were fanned into propaganda material, and all the shifts and deceits that were intended to create a war of nerves, a phony war, unrest, chaos: that was where she had lived, the scene from which she had issued. This woman who had worked with Soviet scientists in their own country but who now called herself an opponent of Communism: Eva Droumek. He had never heard the name in connection with scientific matters. In the snatches of news from colleagues and acquaintances who attended reputable international scientific conferences, her name was not included. That of the chemist Lerinskaya was the one which was always mentioned with those of the three scientists of whom she had spoken. But of Lerinskaya this woman had said nothing until he had raised the point. And that, too, puzzled him.

The whole situation disturbed him with its flavor of the obscure, the sensational, the scandalous. He wondered how she had come to reside with Bertha. And Bertha

. . . At the moment he had entered the hall, explaining and then introducing him to Eva and making it plain to him that Eva was getting on her nerves and that if he didn't take this restless, high-spirited woman off her hands for the remainder of the evening . . .

Where had Bertha made the acquaintance of this peculiar person? For what particular reason had she brought her into her home? Did she know as much about her life and work as he did?

He supposed that he could put these questions to Bertha and satisfy his curiosity about Eva. But wasn't he pursuing something else, besides curiosity? Why not admit that he was thoroughly suspicious regarding this Eva Droumek? Why not give a name to those suspicions? Why not . . .

He looked squarely and intently at her. In her own way, attractive. And intelligent. And a clever research assistant, a metallurgical chemist, and a woman with a good deal of guile. But—nothing that he could prove or disprove, nothing substantial in itself, and capable of giving her the air of integrity which she should possess. A woman who belonged to no place, no profession, and whose character was complex and faintly stressed only by a coarseness and vulgarity that now confronted him.

And when, after a moment's hesitancy, he yielded to his suspicions and gave a name to her, the word instantly seemed apt to describe the deliberate half-truths, evasions, and ambiguities in which she dealt, and which were the very components of her history and her character. It explained her at last. It was the answer to all the questions that she had excited in him.

He was startled. A spy—espionage. He had never imagined that anything of that kind would trickle towards him; and he felt a revulsion, as well as a sense of igno-

miny, at this evidence of its murk and cunning in such proximity to him. The ignominy was from that sense of inferiority, and the wound of envy and jealousy, which she had been able to inflict on him. She had had to attack him from some direction, and like a fool he had unwarily succumbed. The rest—and he still did not doubt the truth of it—was merely a device of strategy, to strike a note of friendship, to establish herself in a possible friendship. And from that point, with her exuberant kiss—to entice him . . .

He was not the first scientist to come under attack. The Eva Droumeks of the world could take their choice of innumerable paths to the private man inside the scientist, the trusted embassy servant, or any other quarry. It was only necessary to come by the route which led from the man to the outer world. Seduction had a fair and plausible face, and fine words that could warm fallacies, increase the temperature of dozens of private conceits, and even offer martyrdom for a false cause. He knew that. Loyalty and the oath of secrecy still did not prevent any number of conceits from taking root. The sum of one's specialized knowledge, the publicized importance of one's job, engendered the weeds of conceit. Even in himself, there had been occasions when conceit had carried a point. It was the same with colleagues, with the learned and scholarly. He had seen conceit take many of them upon the obtuse course because to march with what appeared commonplace was to lose a little of one's valuation of oneself. The famous and the obscure adherents of Communism, for instance. If it were not Communism, it would be something else. Anything, as long as one could assert one's difference from the multitude. It was to the private valuation of oneself in a particular direction that the spy came.



He supposed he was lucky to have eluded this one. He had not gone under. He had not committed himself. The appeal had been to his charity. She had confided in him. She sought his friendship . . .

He had yet to decide what he would tell Bertha, what steps he would take beyond that. Looking at Eva, he saw her as the embodiment of the devices, the ruses and tricks, the crude and curiously makeshift forces that were applied in espionage.

As the train approached London, the other passengers had alighted at their stations along the line. For the last ten minutes of the journey, he and Eva were alone. She rested her hands on the seat and leaned forward.

"I have told you those things, but you will forget them and not speak of them, please. Not speak of them to anybody, because I must forget them and find some other work," she said.

He nodded his head. She sat back. He hoped she would not demand a promise from him. She was watching him quizzically and perhaps with misgivings. The facts which she had given him rose massively for an instant, like heavy things unresolved in his mind. The names—and last of all, Kulin. And then a sudden recollection of a paragraph in print.

Eva's attitude and expression seemed to encourage and await the words that came to his lips.

"Kulin—he was shot, wasn't he?" he said. "I read about him, some time ago. He was tried and condemned as a spy, and executed."

She looked away quickly. The train entered the station and glided along the platform. Eva rose.

"Was that true?" he said.

The train halted, and he opened the door. She did not

answer his question. Kulin—Kulin—he was sure the name was Kulin.

In the taxi on the way home, and after a long silence, she said, "Now you understand why I have escaped from Communism."

She said it without looking at him. She was sitting there, staring in front of her, with her features sullen and lax. Neither of them spoke for several minutes. Suddenly, with a curious vehemence, she rounded on him, her face full of anger. Yet her question was curiously subdued.

"Where did you learn of this crime?"

"About . . ."

"Yes, this trial and the shooting."

"It was in a newspaper. A small paragraph. That was all."

She sat back against the upholstery. Minutes later, she said, "A small paragraph . . ."

But as soon as they reached the house, she recovered. She laughed softly, and speaking quietly so as not to awaken Bertha who had gone to bed, she said, "But perhaps it is not true. Many things in the newspapers are a mistake."

She removed her hat and shook her fine hair free.

"You are very tired?" she said.

"No," Fawley said.

She quickly took off the light summer coat she was wearing.

"Sit down," she said. "Don't go to bed just yet. I will put these in my room, then we have something to drink."

He sank into an armchair. Something to drink. He wondered whether it would be tea or one of the soft drinks. And with it, what? Questions from her? Or from

him? But what was there to ask her which she would answer truthfully? And even were she to speak the truth, what could he do? Did he want that sordid scrap of additional information, or whatever lies she would tell him? Would it not be wiser to speak to Bertha first of all, tomorrow, and then . . .

What did one do with a spy? Ring up the police? Her wide smile when she came gliding in so silently in her bedroom slippers seemed to mock his dilemma which, perhaps, she read in his sprawl and his heavy expression.

He got up. "What do you propose to drink?" he said.

"A cool drink, eh?"

"I'll bring it."

"But I mix it. I make from a recipe . . ."

He brought three bottles from Bertha's sideboard in the dining room where, as he saw, his bed was prepared.

"I wouldn't try to mix those, if I were you," he said.

"Just give me some of the orange, please."

She had filled a water jug.

"First," she said, at the table behind him, "I will ask you to taste . . ."

"Might be quite good," he thought. "Some fruity mixture . . ."

He heard a spoon in a tumbler.

"A little sugar," she was saying, "in the orange, and then some lemon."

She presently handed him a tumbler in which there was an inch of liquid.

"Taste it," she said. "Drink it and tell me if this is good."

He swallowed it at a gulp, and gave her the empty glass.

"Very nice, thanks."

She handed him a full glass a moment later, and sat down opposite him with her own. Drinking thirstily, she

seemed suddenly to have forgotten his presence in the room. She held the glass in both hands, near her lips, and sipping it occasionally after that first draught she stared pensively at it with lowered head and sleepy eyes. And presently she yawned.

"I am so sleepy," she murmured, "so sleepy."

She gave him a drowsy glance and smile. He drained his glass.

"Me, too," he said, rising.

"You are going to bed?"

"If you'll excuse me . . ."

And as he wandered limply from the room, he was too tired to articulate. He could only whisper a good night, and whisper to himself that this leaden weariness which was stealing upon his limbs and already seducing so pleasantly his consciousness was the effect of a drug which she had . . . probably . . . mixed . . . a nice mixture . . . the key from his wallet . . . into the turn-up of his trousers. And with a clear conscience he left his wallet on the little table which Bertha had placed beside his bed. There was nothing in it that could tell the woman in the other room anything of his work. There was some paper money, two snapshots which he had taken of the Cornish coast, some receipts, a note of his bank balance, and that unconsciously amusing letter from Peter about their old motor launch. It was the last thing he remembered when he got into the hard, narrow little bed and started to draw the sheet over his shoulder. And it was the first thing which Eva found when, three hours later, after long and alternating periods of decision and indecision, she left her bed, put on her flimsy dressing gown, and crept to his room to search it.

In the profound hush of night, there were only the vague sounds from the old structure of the house: the

creaking of woodwork; the flaking of stone or brickwork in the chimneys; the soft fall of soot into empty fireplaces; and somewhere a tap dripping, and a door swinging in a faint current of air. And over all of them, the sound of Bertha snoring; and, nearer, the snoring of Fawley in drugged sleep.

She did not hurry. She had given him three of the tablets in that glass, and he would sleep for at least eight hours. And Bertha—she too would sleep deeply after a troubled week. And upstairs, and next door, everywhere in the city, sleep would be deep, heavy after the week, after the pursuits of Saturday night, and because this day was Sunday.

She went methodically about the search. Through his clothes, turning out the pockets and finding strange odds and ends: bus tickets, bits of pencils, a rubber band, a button, his keys, his cash, some crumpled twenty-franc notes. Carefully, through all the pockets. And then, seated on the bed, she examined leisurely the contents of his wallet.

The puzzling letter from somebody called Peter.

*Dear Chris*

*When I found her, she was lying upside down, or pretty near it, and there is no doubt that she has been badly knocked about. I managed to right her, but there is a rent in her side about a foot long. I patched her up, and she'll do until we can get her to the experts.*

She put it aside. She looked under the pillows, in the bed. She examined his shoes and his socks. After that, she sat for a while looking down at his lax body. Man, scientist, a kind of enemy, so much in her power now, and yet still not in her power. All the knowledge, all the



purpose to which that knowledge was put, all the projects—embedded in the texture of his mind. Tantalizing and triumphant fact! And even when she unfastened the jacket of his pajamas, looking for a money belt in which treasures might be hidden by him, he was submitted to her and yet beyond her to reach.

Her hands rested on his sides. The smooth, warm flesh which her hands held between them was still his, still the source which, no matter how she held it thus, yielded nothing to her. Nothing except an ache that ran through memory to Kulin and that cut a furrow through her life, and through her present purpose. The utter futility of this search occurred to her. But it wasn't so much a search for information. It was for some crumb that might restore her to herself.

She slipped her left arm around Fawley and lifted him while she felt beneath the sheets and the blankets. But even while she held him, embraced him, there was still no hope. She was defeated everywhere: as an agent of her government; as a woman seeking friends in a new life.

She settled his lax body in the bed and rose to examine the suitcase. But of course there was nothing to be found there. Everything was safely concealed in his mind.

She came back to the bed and stood looking down at him. A door creaked on its hinges. A shadow appeared to move. Bertha!

She looked up. Vort was standing in the doorway. He came noiselessly in, gliding towards the bed, standing on the other side of it, the weapon in his right hand symbolizing his life.

"I said Monday!" she exclaimed, hissing at him.

He nodded at the sleeper.

"Is he likely to sleep for a long time?"

"If he comes awake . . ."

Vort smiled. He came around the bed and glanced inquisitively about him. Nothing was out of place, but he seemed to guess what she had done.

"What have you found?" he said, whispering.

"Nothing, nothing. Now go! Go!"

He ignored her and took up the letter, but in the faint light of the summer night his eyes were not as sharp as hers were to read what was written. She snatched the letter from him.

"It is nothing!"

He towered over her. "Do you know that there is no time to lose, waiting until Monday morning? You have put him to sleep nicely. I am here. Outside, I have our people to help us. And I have a car. Also, I have someone who has served us so badly that this is the only chance to do anything. I am ready to take him up and—home."

He smiled. He tapped the muzzle of the automatic on her arm.

"Hold this, while I lift him."

She shook her head. "No, no! Go away, and do as I say."

She pushed him aside. She put the letter back into the wallet, and faced him. He said, "I am going to have my way."

She realized that he was determined to follow his own course. She was powerless to prevent him. He stooped down. His hands were already on Fawley when the telephone in the room across the hall emitted a single note. He looked up. His nerves were superb.

"Answer it," he said, sharply but suavely.

The bell rang steadily, shattering the silence, while Vort stood there looking up at her. His hands were on Fawley. Eva Droumek folded her arms. It was going to be a conflict of nerves. Hers against Vort's.

"Hurry!" he said.

"I am going to let it ring so that it will bring Miss Grigg from bed. Then I shall . . ."

She dared not let it continue much longer. At any moment, it would rouse Bertha.

"She will see you and call the police," she said.

Suddenly, he swore at her in German, furiously, and turning abruptly he ran, actually ran from the room, across the hall, through the kitchen. She followed him swiftly and locked the kitchen door behind him.

When she reached the telephone, Bertha was already standing in the open doorway of her room. She had switched on her light.

Lifting the receiver, Eva listened. Nobody spoke. The instrument hummed very faintly while she waited for a voice to speak. But she spoke to it.

"Go away, Fizzy! No, this is not Cuddly. No!"

She slammed down the receiver and turned to Bertha.

"It was Fizzy," she said, laughing sleepily and going towards her room. "Asking for Cuddly."

"Oh, what a fancy, at this time of night!" Bertha said, drowsily. "But I was sure I heard—and I don't think I locked the kitchen door . . ."

"I will look," Eva said, going through to the kitchen door, hoping that Vort was gone.

She dared not go right through. She knew that he was there and that what she had seen mounting in his lean face was not reason but frenzy and failure that could so easily transform defeat into something worse.

She went back to Bertha.

"I locked it," she said.

"Thanks."

Bertha's door closed. Eva slowly closed her own door and stood in the pale light of dawn, hearing in the hush

the sound of sibilant whispers rising in a strange impact that burst into a gasp. Then a shot sounded.

In a nearby street, a car was racing. The brakes screeched. Then silence resumed. Perhaps the car's engine missing. Or Vort?

She got into bed. But there was no sleep for her. The thin light increased, and the day which she had awaited and which had always been inevitable in her life dawned with a little soft gust of wind that shook the boughs of the lilac tree beyond the window.

## 31

Vort had not lingered in the kitchen. He sped out when he heard Bertha. He went through the garden, looking for Andrew and Lettie. The garden gate was wide open, and Andrew was in the alley, alone.

He hadn't expected Vort to return so soon. But in a life that had been so much distorted and encumbered by the unexpected, Vort's return was only one more familiar aspect of forces which, unlike this man, he had never learned how to manipulate. And as he saw now, by allowing Lettie to go into the alley to see if all was clear there, he had asserted his scrap of integrity for the first time, only to fail.

He had impetuously retreated into the alley when he saw Vort coming from the house. What was worse, he had loaned his automatic to Lettie when she had begged

for it. Her pretext wasn't necessary. He was prepared to surrender to her because he knew that defeat was a fact, and because she was from the winning side. He trusted her to safeguard him. It wasn't necessary for him to ask her terms or for her to state them. She had some kind of benevolence which he sensed.

"I'll be back in no time," she had said.

"Where is she?" Vort demanded; and he went on, furiously. "What are you doing out here? I said wait in there!"

For an instant, Andrew considered a lie. It would be easy. Vort had never mistrusted him. This evening, he had confided the final plan to him: a reckless, desperate project, like snatching victory from the grasp of victors. Nothing less than a kidnapping, like an episode in guerilla warfare. To capture Fawley, confront Lettie with him, and extort everything from them. It was no longer espionage. It was just Vort at the end of himself, defeated but unwilling to admit it, and snatching at the last expedient that his nature offered. Vort, demented with vanity, fear, anger. A doomed man. Insane. . . .

No lie would serve to melt his rage or invoke reason from him. Andrew realized that.

"She's coming back," he said.

And as much to his own surprise as to Vort's, she came hastening back to them from the other end of the alley, the look of satisfaction and success on her face betraying her.

"It's all right," she whispered. "That end is clear. I wanted to be sure, Vort. Come on, if you want to . . ."

He knew. She saw that. He knew every twist of cunning, from experience. His frenzied stare rooted out the facts. That she had sped round the corner to the call box and—first things first—dialed Bertha's number so that the



bell ringing would awaken Bertha, interrupt him, send him flying away.

"You telephoned!" he said.

She frowned. The Colonel was coming in. She had seen and recognized her own colleagues, hurrying around. Even now, they were approaching from the end of the alley, behind Vort, who suddenly aimed his automatic at her and then glanced over his shoulder and saw . . .

"Lettie, you don't . . ." he exclaimed, then his words thickened, ran together in distortion, like his mad features. His left hand struck down her own that was raised to shoot. She saw Andrew grab his right arm and slither back from Vort's thrust. The weapon came up. And Andrew seemed to leap to tremendous stature before her, facing Vort. There was a swift scuffle, then the shot sounded, and the thick figure that had shielded her lurched, crumpled at Vort's feet.

She aimed at Vort's head, at the brow above the void stare. Soundlessly, an arm encircled Vort, wrenched the Walther, dragged him backwards; and other figures, so swift, so soundless in their deft violence dropped cloth over his head, whirled him away. So soundless, so swift as to terrify her as she stood with her arm still raised and the weapon which she had begged from Andrew still pointed.

In the distance, a car's brakes screeched. She knelt beside Andrew's body. Somebody was standing nearby, whispering to her. The words made a single word which seemed to sound in her and pour across her thoughts.

She heard herself repeating it. "Dead—dead . . ." The swarthy face took an insidious pallor that seemed to gather below the skin. The dark eyes were looking at her, and the slightly open mouth seemed about to form a smile.

She rose unsteadily to her feet. She had had something to give him, something for a life that had retained all along its ember of virtue. She had never suspected that, in the end, he would give so much to her, and that perhaps all along he had . . .

"I never thought, I never knew . . ."

But the Colonel and two of his assistants had come rapidly to the scene.

"Is this . . ." he said, looking down at the crumpled body.

"That's the one called Andrew," somebody said, and added, "He's had it."

"I never even thought he'd . . ." Lettie whispered, tremulously.

They all looked at her, and she was conscious for the first time of the tears in her eyes and on her cheeks, and the weapon in her hand.

"It was that beast Vort, aiming at me, and this . . . And little Andrew . . ."

She talked rapidly, rather hysterically, trying to explain to the Colonel what Andrew had done. But he was in a hurry. He was giving terse, muttered little orders all the time she was whispering. And when Andrew's body had been hurriedly removed, the Colonel spoke to her, taking the weapon from her hand, saying a little irritably and then soothingly, "Yes, yes, yes, I know, I know, but come along."

His whisper was so sibilant, like the dawn wind idly touching the foliage of a tree in Bertha's garden.

"Hurry, hurry," he was saying. "Before the neighbors . . ."

But even while they tiptoed through the alley, lights began to shine in the windows above the gardens, and a window was noisily raised, and a voice spoke clearly

through the dawn's first light, "There's something happened."

Lettie paused.

"Please," the Colonel whispered, anxiously, "at all costs, we must prevent a scandal."

"But Droumek?"

"Later on, today, when Miss Grigg is at church—if she goes—you can collect Droumek."

He took her arm, and she winced.

"I'm sorry, but do hurry, please. Everything—later on, after you've had some sleep. And believe me, Droumek won't budge, not while Fawley is still there."

And when he was in the car with her, he added, cheerfully, so cheerfully that it depressed her, "All of them, in custody, except the lady herself and the Andrew one. Very nice work! I congratulate you!"

For a moment or two she couldn't speak. Then she controlled her grief.

"Congratulate the Andrew one," she said, flatly.

## 32

At nine o'clock, when Fawley tapped on Bertha's door and entered the room, she was sitting up in bed with the breakfast tray on her lap. She sipped her coffee.

"Have you had breakfast, Chris?" she said.

"In bed, just now."

"She's an obliging soul, isn't she?" Bertha said.

"Very."

With his hands thrust into the pockets of his dressing gown, he sat at the foot of Bertha's broad bed.

"Did somebody phone you, just now?" Bertha said, cutting a slice of toast.

"Yes, it was a call for me. To summon me to a meeting."

"Does that mean you'll be leaving this morning?"

"Leave here about midday."

"What a pity!"

"I'll be up again, fairly soon."

She glanced at him and met his wistful half-smile and his accusing gaze.

"Enjoy yourselves, last night?" she said, lowering her head.

"We covered thousands of miles."

Bertha held the sides of the tray and sat back against the pillows.

"What does that mean?" she said.

His smile vanished and he looked very serious.

"Where did you pick her up, Bertha?" he asked.

"Charles met her on the flight from Sweden and invited her to stay with them until she had permission to remain in the country. When it came, Edna took her to the hotel—an awful place which wasn't at all suitable. So yesterday afternoon, Edna brought her here."

He was looking at her with his pale, contemplative eyes, as though he were still waiting for the truth. She frowned and looked away.

"What else could we do?" she said.

He grinned at her. "It was a bit of a problem, I suppose."

"Chris, it's no laughing matter!"

"What did you expect to do with her?" he said.

"I couldn't phone the police and give her up, could I?"

"Not a very nice thing to do."

She sighed. "The whole business—I really don't know what to do with her. We decided . . ."

"We?"

"As soon as Edna set eyes on her, she knew. You had better know the truth, Chris, in confidence. It was—Charles. He became a Communist some time back, and this business was—oh, some underhand business which he helped to fix."

"And you say that permission to stay in this country was actually given . . ."

Bertha nodded. "She had it in writing. I took her around to the police station and she registered there, yesterday afternoon. The thing is this, Chris. Edna and I dared not let her wander off to do whatever she came here to do. If she were arrested, it would come back upon Charles, and on Edna. I thought, if I had her here . . ."

He nodded gravely.

"I suppose it sounds daft," she said.

"Your real motive is to screen Charles, not to make a better woman of your guest," he said.

"I thought the two could be served at the same time."

"A problem for Solomon," he said.

"No, I thought . . . I was quite convinced . . ."

"But do you think she'll let you do it? You don't imagine that she'll settle down here with you, as simply as that?"

"What else can she do? She knows that Edna and I know that she isn't a refugee."

"And she certainly knows as well that the two of you want to shield Charles."

"All the same . . ."

"It can't be done," he said.



"In time, with patience. Just think, Chris. I mean, if Charles is laid by the heels. The awful trouble, and the scandal and ruin. And the sensation, the nasty sensation if Eva is exposed. What is the good of being a Christian in a Christian community if—oh, think of it—isn't it necessary to do something more than fearing God and going to church and making your own passage to heaven safe? Why not pull Charles out of dreadful trouble, and have a go at saving Eva? Is it so daft a thing to do? There's no precedent for dealing with a spy, except in wartime. But there's plenty of precedent for applying some charity of spirit. What do you think?"

He remembered what Eva Droumek had told him last night. He was trying to determine whether there was sincerity in her behavior. He wondered why she had confided in him, and then drugged him and searched his pockets and gone through his wallet.

He shook his head. "I don't know, Bertha. I really don't know. There is the private duty, and the responsibility of the citizen; and moral responsibility, and all the laws of God and man . . ."

"And wars all the time."

She poured herself more coffee.

"What will they do with her?" she said.

"Who are they?"

"If she's arrested."

"Deport her, most likely," he said. "It's what her own people will do to her that matters. They'll discard her; shoot her; shove her into a penal camp and leave her there."

"And they're the people who hope to rule the world!"

He got up from the bed and returned to the dining room where he had slept. He finished dressing. In the air there was sunlight and the Sunday hush through

which there presently rolled the pealing church bells' notes. And half an hour later, fully dressed and tugging on her gloves, Bertha appeared in the doorway of his room.

"Chris, I'll be back from church before you leave."

"Don't I come with you?" he said.

"That puts me in another quandary. I don't want Eva left alone here. One of us must stay at home."

"Go on!" he said. "Thy need is greater than mine . . ."

"I expect you are right. But I'll pray for you."

Half an hour later, he came from his room and wandered aimlessly into the drawing room. The Sunday newspapers were lying on a chair, and he glanced at one of them, standing with his back to the window and holding the newspaper wide open.

He was all the time conscious of something yet to be done, yet to be said, discussed. He couldn't persist in the idea that she had confided in him to that extent only to further her tactics as an agent of her masters. That was merely an idea which he wanted to believe because, in the subterranean regions of his character, he was jealous of her. It would suit him to see her deported.

He folded the newspaper abruptly and went in search of her. She was in the garden, putting another coat of paint on the crazy little shed.

"Thank you for breakfast in bed, Tania Lerinskaya," he said.

She stopped painting, put the brush into a glass jam jar, and stood back, looking at him. She slowly dusted her hands.

"Why did they send you over here?" he said.

Motion waned from her hands, and a look of incredulity filled her features. She smiled slightly at the absurdity of the question. He felt ridiculous.

"To look over my shoulder, I suppose, and see what I am doing," he said, sharply. "Was that it?"

"We were interested," she said.

"Desperately," he remarked. "To use the methods you chose, right down in currents of human nature. And last night: to dope me. A crude effort."

He laughed crisply. "You didn't believe that I carried series of calculations around with me, did you? Or a set of plans? Didn't your own experience as a research chemist tell you that that sort of thing . . ."

She folded her arms and pouted angrily, staring at him as though she did not understand what he was saying. And turning away slowly, she went indoors.

He did not follow her immediately. He was trying to examine the whole business logically. Spying, he thought, a definite feature of contemporary affairs. They were as sensitive to it, in her country, as the Middle Ages had been to the belief in witchcraft and the whole horror of the gulf lying between reason and unreason. They had their modern form of the witch hunt. His idea of them was that they had gone off at a tangent. He was amused. What was it: Dialectical materialism?

"The futile asses," he thought.

He went in, more to see one subject of that insane experiment than to resolve what problem still existed between himself and this spy.

But it was, after all, only the spy he saw, as she sat with her legs curled beneath her on the settee. For a moment, he thought, "Communism—appealing to the bit of the child which remains in some of our own scientists and big shots. We never quite, I suppose, lose something of the child we were once."

And when Droumek's big eyes turned their gaze to him, he knew that if she had been a little more perceptive,

and not such a liar, and much more adroit in her methods, she could have influenced the remnant of the adolescent in him: his unwary, inexperienced attitude to most women, unless they were like Bertha. And even now—but he was quite sure that she would never appreciate that aspect of him, for it was clear to him that she did not understand herself. Last night, several voices had spoken in her: the scientist, the espionage agent; the bogus political refugee. But the woman in her, so timid, so thwarted by the rest of her, so starved and distorted by an ideology, for of course there was no doubt that she was a zealous and deeply indoctrinated Marxist. But the kiss which she had given him . . .

He felt ashamed and dissatisfied with himself. Her brilliant gaze seemed to perceive that much. Everybody, he told himself, has a weak spot. . . .

He had no illusions about her sojourn in Bertha's flat. He could have told her that at any minute persons would come to take her into custody. The telephone call which he had received had been from someone who was quite well known to him and who had asked if she were still in the flat. His own instructions were to report, later in the day, to certain officials. As to the lady, he needn't worry. He could be quite sure that she would be taken care of.

She turned her gaze from him as though she were disillusioned and disappointed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm not like my friend Bertha. She has a warm heart and boundless common sense."

It seemed to excite her. She turned to him as though he had solved a formidable problem for her.

"Yes, she was the only person who . . ." She paused suddenly, laughed softly, and went on, ". . . who defeats

me from the time I first see her, and who gives me so much. But all the same, all the time I am here, there are other people, and now they are very near and soon they will arrive . . .”

“Suppose,” he said, “suppose they don’t?”

He remembered vividly the sense of harmony, of being in the company of a woman who shared so much with him. And now, recalling it: the glimpse of the authentic woman; the aspect of the personal being who had invoked in him that response, his thoughts flowed into the fantasy. Certainly, the woman with whom, perhaps, his life would have been happy. A woman brought a short distance from the pressure of the ideology . . .

She did not answer him. He was glad. It had been an idle question. Her silence had prevented both of them from making real the regrets, the weight of disappointment that words would have engendered. He was whole, still.

He got up to pack his case. And when that was done and his taxi was waiting for him, he wondered what had detained Bertha. Half-past eleven. There would be time, he thought, to take the route to the church, pick up Bertha, and ask her to accompany him to the station. He could then explain to her about Eva; and perhaps, while that was happening, she would be spared seeing Eva taken into custody.

He went to Eva’s room. She was dressed to go out, and her cases were packed and she was fastening them. Her hands became still as he approached.

“I have to go now,” he said.

She gazed at him, and he felt at that moment how easy it would be for him to afford her confused life something from his sense of wholeness. But what? He tried to think,



puzzled as much by that sense of richness as by his inability to define it to himself so that he could impart something of it to her. But there was nothing.

"I'm sorry," he said, realizing that whatever defeat she had suffered was in her attempt to take from him facts for her masters, and that her failure would earn a brutal punishment. He offered his hand to her.

She sensed for the first time his astonishingly unfledged temperament in its course through this contact with her. It was so plain to her now. Her contempt was enormous. To have lost so much because she had failed to discern that weakness deep in his nature! If she could have gone back under the defeat from British security and, at home, after making her report, received the reward of success!

It was too late. But she was determined to inflict upon him a wound which would remain upon the sensitive and fragile texture. She put her arms about him. And by yielding to that embrace he knew that he had divided himself, surrendered the essence of his happiness to a woman he would never forget.

In the taxi, after he had found Bertha, he saw below the face of circumstances that ordained Eva's life, his own, Bertha's, the private world with its encounters and its greater significance of relationships that were spoiled, ravaged, interrupted, and rendered ridiculous and futile by a jealous, encompassing reality that was nothing more than the fake image of mankind itself.

"I suppose we are all of us, to some extent, to blame," he said, from his thoughts.

"Blame?" Bertha said. "For what? Unless you mean for dangling a carrot in front of her nose, when all the time we knew that we were leading her into a snare."

"I suppose that's it," he said.

"And now she'll be deported. It seems silly to me. I

wish—Chris, I wish I could have her back, and finish what we began. But I suppose what I should have done was to have gone to the police about her, last Monday. And taken Edna with me, and lugged Charles along too.”

“It might have saved a lot of bother,” he said. And he added, “You can always trust duty.”

“We are all doing our duty,” she said, with disgust. “For some party, for some parcel of gangsters in power, or something or other. If only we were left alone to love our neighbors as ourselves, instead of being told to kill them.”

Fawley was silent.

## 33

When Lettie rang the house bell, there was only one thing which she knew for certain. It was that Bertha was at church. The rest . . .

She was prepared for trouble; but as soon as the door was opened by Eva, she knew that no trouble would come from this elegant woman who was already dressed to go out. She went in quickly.

“I’m sorry I am late, Miss Droumek.”

“An accident?” Eva said, looking at the untidy bandage on Lettie’s arm.

“Not this one. Another one. Much more serious.”

“Very unfortunate,” Eva said. She looked away and added, “I am ready, if you wish to leave now.”

She turned towards her room. Just to take no risks at

all, Lettie followed her to the doorway. No sign of Chris.

"Is Dr. Fawley here?" she said.

Eva had lifted her cases and was standing before her.

"He left not long ago."

For two or three seconds, Lettie did not move. She had had a hideous night, living out the reality of the last insane dregs of Vort's abominable philosophy. The last look round: the Fun Fair, the beer, the sights; his farewell to flesh, in the night club; his last dance, his last meal. If only she had fired before he had!

But the Colonel said that it was nicely concluded, in success. Outwardly, yes. But there had to be something more than his kind of success, no matter how comprehensive it was. And she could not believe that there was any. At the last minute, it had eluded her because although she had worked for two years to make possible what the Colonel wished to achieve, she had also applied herself to a subsidiary cause. She had been defeated there, by Vort. And now there was only this last thing left to do: the lugging of the quarry to the Colonel.

Droumek confronted her with that look of satisfaction on her face; and she was dressed to depart as though she couldn't wait to be sent back to Prague with—perhaps it was something which she had, after all, succeeded in extracting from Fawley.

Lettie was very pale and very tired. Her arm needed dressing; and last night's activities had inflamed the wound which was beginning to ache worse than ever. But there was the mental discomfort, the deep, spiritual confusion, the two years' running with the hares and hunting with the hounds, the betrayal of Vort all the time, and yet the fundamental sympathy for fat little Andrew. She no longer felt whole. She should have foreseen, she should have known that it was Andrew who had surely

protected her for so long from Vort—hadn't he?—wasn't that his bargain with her, tacit between them, and hadn't she failed him, miserably allowed Vort to shoot him, when she could have fired?

And Droumek seemed to her to discern that failure and to taunt her because of it. Droumek, so whole, so self-possessed, so elegant, so satisfied, mocking her because she owed her life and much of her victory to Andrew. It was humiliating.

"You wanted to speak to Dr. Fawley?" she said.

Lettie shook her head. She turned slowly towards the house door. She had not missed the taunt in the question. She remembered information which the Colonel had given her half an hour previously. Facts about Droumek's real identity. Not those relating to Eva, the espionage agent, but ones that disclosed that this was someone called Lerinskaya, eminent as a chemist, a front-rank scientist. And thus, someone who shared with Fawley something from which she, Lettie, was for ever excluded.

The Colonel was not likely to let Droumek be sent away without first interrogating her, and then requesting someone to question Fawley regarding events. So much for what concerned security and the Colonel. There was more. There was this chemist, Lerinskaya, who was first of all a woman, and whose great dark eyes held an unmistakable secret.

She could have it. It wasn't much. It could not be compared to her own: that gift from Andrew.

"Sorry I can't help you with your cases," Lettie said. "But it's not far to the car, around the corner."

Fifteen minutes later, she presented Droumek to the Colonel. He rose and offered his visitor a chair.

"I have been expecting you for the past week," he said, without irony.

"I should have come before this," Eva said, "but I met some pleasant people and was detained. Forgive me."

"Certainly," he murmured, seating himself. "And now, what can I do for you?"

Like two old friends, Lettie thought, slipping out unobtrusively. Two adversaries face to face and without weapons, at the end of the game. And both of them had got something out of it. Success for him. And—but she didn't want to dwell on what she imagined had passed between Fawley and Eva.

She felt grieved and disgruntled. Up to last night, to the moment when she had hastened back to find Vort raging at Andrew, success had seemed sweet. But its cost had been too heavy. That little man, symbol of all the hapless ones driven, ordered about, badgered into false duty, false loyalty. The miracle, the enchanting miracle was that he had not only retained that virtue but the courage, the utter selflessness with which to express it.

Her tears came again. She was trudging through the sunlight and comparative emptiness of London's Sunday noon, with the flaring pain in her arm, and the ache in her heart.

"That beast Vort!" she cried.

She had envisaged a holiday for herself, abroad, by the sea, far away from London. But it didn't seem decent to hurry away so soon, or to think of enjoying oneself. She walked to Bertha's to whom it would have been comforting for oneself, and for her, to have exchanged confidences. But happily, Bertha had nothing to say, except about the neglected wound on the arm.

"Good heavens! This is . . . How did this happen?"

"My own fault. I burned myself . . . On a flame."

It was pleasant to relax and have Bertha attending skilfully to her and with such solicitude. She said so.



Bertha said, "You're not like some people. I put myself out for—someone, recently, and she hadn't a word of genuine gratitude to offer in return."

"The last word on it," Lettie thought.

## 34

She might think that it was, and so might Charles think that what ran so hotly in his mind when he returned to town on Monday was the final fact that would bring disaster on him.

He came up after a tense week-end which had culminated with a story overheard on Sunday night at the saloon bar in the hotel.

The voice rose from a little cluster of week-enders further along the counter.

". . . over in Maida Vale, chap was telling me. He said he heard the shot and saw two chaps carry the body from an alley and heave it into a car. He heard, he said, someone called Vort was the one who did the shooting."

Charles couldn't sleep. He spoke to Edna, telling her that he was sure Vort was someone the Doctor had mentioned to him, yes he was sure Vort was connected with the affair, as the Doctor was.

"What is the good of dwelling on these things?" Edna said, "and inventing all sorts of consequences?"

He traveled by the first train to town, leaving Edna to follow later in the car. He had to see the Doctor, for

he was the only person who could give him facts, news that would allow him to anticipate further events.

He was at the Doctor's house by a quarter past nine, standing there, ringing the bell above the shining plate with its single word: PSYCHOLOGIST.

He kept ringing for several minutes, while all around him the temperate sunlight, the soft summer air, the rising activity of the city seemed to swell into something which he had violated and which was gathering about him to engulf him. He rang again to be admitted. His anxieties that had mounted since Saturday night boiled in him. He could not control them. His patience, like his courage, was destroyed. His body trembled with fear.

The door opened. He saw the sleep-crusted face, the mop of dark, disordered hair, the slatternly dressing-gown.

"The Doctor . . ." he stammered, moving forward.

The drowsy face showing in the grudging space assumed a vulgar vivacity and an ingratiating smile.

"I'm afraid the Doctor can't see nobody at the moment."

He recognized the voice. She was the Doctor's wife.

"It's extremely urgent," he said. "Please tell him . . ."

"Well, you see, he's not 'ere at the moment."

"Then I'll wait inside. I must see him," he insisted.

Still holding the door open no wider than six inches, she blinked quickly. "Oh, you're the gent that was on the phone to me, Sat'day! Well, you see, I'll tell you. My 'usband said he 'ad to go to a peace meeting abroad. He left yesterday, and never said when 'e was comin' back. I'm sorry."

She kept repeating it: I'm sorry. Until she was out of sight behind the door which, all the time she was speaking, was slowly closing. He turned away. Then he met it.

It was in the sunlight and the air and the sound of London. It was the duty and responsibilities which he had disavowed and betrayed and which now rejected him. He had never appreciated their richness and wholesomeness, except to extract opportunities which he transformed into ugly things. He had never given devotion to them. He had confessed to Edna a sense of grievance against what he had called the dull systems; but he had complained only because they did not yield more space to his corrupt character. He was blind to the excellent virtues of colleagues who were loyal, devoted servants of the public. He had never matched those virtues with any from himself. And now . . .

He knew what was imminent for him. His removal from his job, and his transfer to something else. The summons to his chief's room, and a few formal phrases that would tell him with chilly politeness that it had been found necessary to transfer him. No indictment. No explanations given or demanded by the chief. None offered by himself. Only the immediate and ignominious demotion, to a distance from that department, into a corner reserved for the fallen for whom there was still that much mercy.

He could, of course, resign. But—he hadn't, as yet, the courage. He hadn't anything to go to after resignation. He trudged in the direction of his office, telling himself that this was the end of it all, this was what would happen, that he had seen the last of it, and that . . .

"Don't let 'em get you down, comrade!"

It was a command, flat and assertive of the new authority with which this messenger from his office was now invested. Looking down, Charles saw him, no longer in uniform, trotting along beside him amidst the pavement throngs. The cocksure grin was replaced by the tiny

frown of the underling promoted to power. Charles winced as the man's arm nudged him and as the hand firmly dragged him out of the comforting stream that carried both of them. Standing in the shop doorway, out of sight of the distant throng along the main road, Charles knew that he had been brought here to receive party instructions.

He hadn't imagined that in his exposed spirit there remained this portion unfurrowed by fear; and looking down at the cocksure little comrade's buoyancy, he knew that he had never conceived it possible that reality could assume such fantastic pressure as he applied, or fear such a symbol as he presented.

"The party's takin' charge o' things," he was saying. "It's goin' to stand by you. But that means loyalty and discipline from you, when they start the grilling, over there. See? Get it straight. As a sound party member you got nothing to fear. The comrades is supporting you. Bear that in mind, and . . ."

A packed bus roared past, drawing up at the corner. For a moment, a cloud obscured the sunlight. The comrade's sharp words were buried under the deluge of sound as another bus charged through the secluded side street. Charles caught only the last phrase: ". . . dare lift the lid off that one."

It could have been a threat, a warning to him, or a comment upon a presumed official attitude. He looked down to verify its meaning in the tiny compass of features which were familiar to him, but the comrade had disappeared. The sunlight had emerged again; and as Charles plodded from the doorway he was caught in the crowd from the bus. It was comforting. He went with it along the pavement towards the big building, and up the steps and into the wide hall.

The doorman waylaid him.

"Excuse me, sir!"

The robust, extended arm was the unmistakable commencement of a process. He wasn't surprised. The comrade had warned him.

"What is it?"

"This way, sir, if you please."

He was being conducted past his own quarters. He caught a glimpse of the unwary, surprised glances of colleagues, before he was hurriedly admitted to a room in a distant wing where his own chief, along with some senior heads of departments, and an alert, keen-faced stranger, were already seated at a table as though they had been awaiting him—he had the curious sensation that it had been for years. He recognized papers from his office. The stranger had a thick folder which he slowly opened while keeping his mild gaze on Charles. The other faces lifted to him. There was no threat in them. There was only an expression of chilly politeness that was somehow stronger than the little comrade's threat. He felt his belief in the power of the party to render him any kind of support to be as hollow as the whole crude fantasy that lurched with unavailing discipline against the soul of mankind. He was alone. The party simply did not exist in this little cosmos of simple values that had been proved wholesome over the centuries.

It was fear that gave him poise, words, plausibility, and a final belief in himself. If only he could convince these men who were, after all, merely trying to elucidate certain facts . . .

It was not until after lunch, which all of them took on trays brought in by the doorman, that he felt the utter, unwholesome, fatuous folly of his lies and evasions and poses. His spirit lurched suddenly towards the simple



warmth of the integrity represented by these men. He was so alone, with the truth exposed to him. Honor, decency, the humdrum trudge shared by the rest of a generation marching patiently towards authentic human decency, suddenly seemed nearer and more potent than the party's threat. Impetuously, he approached it.

"I suppose I should tell you . . ."

It was only towards the end of that long day, when he had divulged everything, and heard at last his sentence of dismissal, that he considered the party. In the room, there was silence. Outside, the traffic sounded. He heard laughter and the snatches of conversation from passers-by. He thought for a moment of the great face of life, indifferent to the individual tragedy. Fear was like a convulsion in him. He wondered if he had unconsciously mentioned names. He had said only that he had acted upon his own initiative—as a private devotee of Communism. . . . He only vaguely heard his chief expressing disappointment at betrayed faith, and formally conveying dismissal which would be officially intimated later on.

The scrap of integrity which he had craved had not come to him. He went out, at last, bereft of it, his heart lamenting that lost goal until fear filled him at the sight of the little comrade slyly falling into place beside him round the corner.

Dry as the harsh rustling of a dead leaf, the subdued voice said, "So you let 'em jerk it outa you! No, don't argue, comrade. I could see it the moment I set eyes on you. Save your breath. . . ."

Charles flung around at him.

"I told them nothing!"

"Fine! The comrades is waiting to hear about that, right now. This way."

An icy convulsion seized his spirit. The other investiga-

tion had preserved a dignity which would be torn to shreds by the Executive at this forthcoming investigation. With awful emphasis, it occurred to him that he counted for nothing, anywhere. He hadn't even played fair with the manipulators of good faith. As he plodded heavily beside the trotting little guide deeper into the maze of streets, he wondered if he had ever been loyal to anything: friends, Edna, his own character, his own generation. Even the little comrade hurrying him to his doom seemed blessed by a particle of absolute loyalty to the Thing which dazzled him.

"I wish I had your faith—in something," he lamented.

"The trouble wi' you is you've got no discipline."

But almost before he realized the incisive truth of that remark, he was being pushed through the doorway of a little shop's side passage where, in silence, the servants of the local Executive awaited him.

He wondered if ever he would have the chance to attain the self-discipline, the virtues, the respect for honor and decency, all of which he had let go past him; or if these grim, fervent members of the party Executive were figures, after all, not of the party but of Fate awaiting to judge him.

But even if they postponed judgment, and held him in a kind of abeyance—that, too, was punishment, the last of it.

But it was Pulmer who saw the last of it, the final act of something which seemed to him to have touched him with a personal finger.

At the airport. And the arrival of a new ambassador met by a few officials and several press representatives. A diplomat who, in turn smiling and grave, submitted himself to the photographers and the tactful pressmen, made

a short and hopeful statement, and was driven away in a legation car.

Pulmer loitered in the sunlight and wandered into the refreshment lounge for a cup of tea. The afternoon throbbed with a holiday atmosphere. He finished his tea and strolled through the corridor. The voice of the woman announcer over the public-address system sounded in the building.

"Attention, please! Will passengers for the three-twenty flight to Prague kindly assemble at the barrier? Thank you."

Ahead of him, a door opened, and three people entered the corridor and approached him. His friend, the Air Hostess; an urbane little man in a dark suit; and Eva Droumek.

Pulmer recognized her at once. She glanced at him as she went past. The same confident, animated glance which, on Monday of the previous week, had met him when he had stood amongst the pressmen waiting to interview her when she had arrived.

He watched her pass towards the refreshment lounge and out through the doorway into the afternoon sunlight and the summer brightness and the pulsating air. He followed slowly, at a distance, and watched her go aboard the plane last of all. He saw the door close on her, and the steps withdrawn; and he watched the big machine creep out with its thrashing blades into the width and the flooding sunlight, out to the distant end of the runway where it paused, gathered into itself a volume of power and then set out, rising, floating, passing at last into the unassailable loveliness of space.

The Air Hostess stood beside him.

"Deported?" he said. "Sent back!"

There was a note of relief and satisfaction in his tone.

He was the onlooker who, having seen the cards in one player's hands, had spoken of them to the other player. And he was convinced that his intervention had resulted in Eva Droumek's swift arrest.

The Air Hostess said nothing. Something, she supposed, something which he had effected had ended here, as he had wished it to. She could not be sure of that. She did not wish to be. Eva Droumek had been defeated: that was fair enough. But her fate, now that she was being sent back to Prague, had an element of unmerited severity that seemed more than unjust.

Pulmer turned to her.

"No pressmen this time . . ."

She swung around at him. "Have a heart, can't you? Think what she's going back to!"

Flinging away angrily, she left him there. For a moment, the entire airport seemed silent.





## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shortly before publication of this book Random House regretfully learned of the death of its author. At fifty-one F. L. Green had published thirteen novels and attained considerable success for having perfected the "pursuit" story as a form to illuminate many human problems.

His name first became widely known to Americans for the film script of his own novel *Odd Man Out*, which he wrote in collaboration with Carol Reed, who directed the film. Its outstanding success with James Mason in the title role is now motion-picture history.

The wide range of theme and character found in Mr. Green's novels may account for the fact that they have been translated into eleven languages. He was himself of Irish and Huguenot descent and lived for many years in Ireland, spending the last two years of his life in his native England.

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